

Getting Dressed: a study of women's relationship to their clothing

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PhD thesis.

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Abstract

The empirical focus of this thesis is the act of getting dressed. It is based upon an ethnography of women's wardrobes, which took place over a period of 15 months in both London and Nottingham. My research demonstrates that this 'private' moment is the instance when women have to consider both personal tastes and social expectations, and occasions of wearing. As such, the act of dressing involves much wider concerns, such as, social propriety, sexuality, age, status, occupation and ethnicity. Furthermore, because this act takes place at least once a day, it is ubiquitous. However, despite being such an important moment, there is no explicit interrogation of it in contemporary Britain. This research draws upon current emphases on fashion and clothing as practice, yet also employs an anthropological and material culture approach. Despite the rapidly changing styles of clothing that characterize the Western fashion system, this thesis looks at the in-depth, long-term relationship women have with their clothing; how clothing, through its material propensities, encodes social relationships, biographies and identities.

As a result of this grounded, ethnographic approach which encompasses both practices of wearing and the particular materiality of clothing, what emerges from this thesis is an understanding of how women construct them 'selves' through assemblages of clothing. The dominant Western ontology locates the self as 'deep' within the person, as immaterial. However, here I look at the particular means through which the self may be externalized in clothing, and created through the act of dressing. Acts of dressing involve women's projections into future social situations, as they imagine the opinions of others;

as such, women do not exist as 'individuals' but are constituted relationally through this daily act.

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Title page	1
Abstract	2
Contents	4
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Theoretical approaches to the wardrobe and getting dressed	16
Chapter 2: Methodology and the material culture of wardrobes	64
Chapter 3: Biography through the wardrobe: former selves and the co-presence of the past	110
Chapter 4: Looking good: Feeling right – aesthetics of the self	147
Chapter 5: Constructing the surface: getting dressed as the cultivation of the self.	180
Chapter 6: the relational self: situating wardrobes in social networks	214
Chapter 7: Fashion as practice: the burden of rules and the creation of innovations	252
Chapter 8: The core division of wardrobes: ‘habitual’ and ‘non-habitual’ clothing	287
Conclusion: an ethnography of getting dressed.	325
Bibliography	343
Appendix 1: Bio-pics	360
Appendix 2: breakdown of active/inactive clothing	368
<u>Tables:</u>	
Figure 1: Diagram of London network 1	75
Figure 2: Diagram of London network 2	75
Table 1: Number of wardrobes and clothing quantities	91

Table 2: Active: potential: inactive clothing: frequencies of wearing	101
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	<u>Page</u>
<u>Photographs:</u>	
Photo 1: Nom's wardrobe	86
Photo 2: Rosanna's wardrobe	87
Photo 3: A selection of Mumtaz's Indian clothing	125
Photo 4: Mumtaz's Indian wardrobe	126
Photo 5: Vivienne's worn 'sunshine' top	161
Photo 6: Vivienne's silk shirts	164
Photo 7: Vivienne's waistcoat	164
Photo 8: Vivienne's poncho	166
Photo 9: Theresa's 'fun' jeans	221
Photo 10: Theresa's 'fun' gypsy style top	221
Photo 11: Cashmere Maxmara cardigan, gifted from mother	221
Photo 12: Joanna's 'sailor' dress	229
Photo 13: Helen's Liberty print dress	272
Photo 14: Alice's 'fall-back' dress	277
Photo 15: Alice's rule-breaking outfit	280
Photo 16 Clare's ball top	294
Photo 17: Clare's ball skirt	294
Photo 18: Sonya's antique waistcoat	298
Photo 19: Sonya's Indian outfit: top	300
Photo 20: Sonya's Indian outfit: scarf	300
Photo 21 Sonya's Indian outfit: skirt.	300

Introduction.

Wearing only her pale pink silk camisole and shorts, Sadie gazes uninspired at the clothes in her open wardrobe; she is going to her friend's leaving party the following day straight after work, and is attempting to select an outfit before she goes to bed. She stands in front of the wardrobe hoping her imagination will be roused by something she sees hanging before her. Ordinarily she selects her outfit just before going out, when the anticipation of the event galvanizes her into action. However, unsure as to what the weather will be like or what frame of mind she will be in the following day, she is unable to decide as her excitement is cast into shadow by the prospect of an 8 hour working day. She becomes despondent after a while and decides to select her shoes first; they are displayed on a shelf in her bedroom. She tries on her favourite pair: pink ballet-style shoes with high metallic pink heels, which she only wears when she sporadically decides to try them on in her flat. She is so enthralled with the shoes that every outfit with which she has tried them on before has failed to live up to their allure. Sadie is determined to wear them on this occasion, as she stands in front of the mirror, twisting her feet round so that they become visible from every angle, admiring the unusual shade of pink and the sculptural effect of the heels. Basking in the imagined admiration of her friends, she decides resolutely that she must wear the shoes.

She now has to resolve the problem of what to wear with them the following evening, and returns to the wardrobe. As she cannot afford anything new, she frantically looks along her rails for anything that will 'go' with the shoes, and happens upon her cream cord mini-skirt. On trying it on with the shoes she is delighted at the complementarity of

the colours. The skirt, being quite neutral, draws attention to the shoes. As the outfit is now two thirds complete, she is determined not to be thwarted by a lack of a suitable top. As she goes through the piles of tops in the bottom of her wardrobe nothing seems appropriate. She clutches a pile of potentials in her arms, and holds each one in front of her body as she considers it: her cream top is too pale, making the top and skirt blend into one, and all her black, colourful or patterned tops are too dark for the outfit, drawing attention away from the shoes. In her frustration, she flings the clothes on the floor. She stands looking at shoes again in mirror; she is now wearing the cord skirt, and still happens to have her pale pink pyjama top on. On being confronted by her reflection, she makes the fortuitous realization that whole outfit 'goes'. She holds up her feet to examine the shoes, twisting them so they shimmer slightly: "the top's the same colour as the shoes when they catch the light!!" Sadie exclaims in delight. Initially unsure as to whether she can wear her nightwear on a night out in the West End of London, she decides no one will notice. She then selects some underwear to go with the outfit, and ends up selecting a mint green bra with a pink trim: "then there'll be a flash of matching colours" when the top of the bra peeps out at the top of the camisole.

On this particular occasion, Sadie is trying to create an outfit that will be appropriate to the social occasion, yet as she goes out with the same group of friends each weekend she wants an outfit that is still different and unique. As such, dressing involves considerations of the occasion of wearing, incorporating both generic social expectations and the specified opinions of the people she will be seeing. As she dresses, she is therefore bringing in wider aspects of her social existence: her status as a young woman, her

sexuality, relationships with friends and men she wants to impress. She has to negotiate a balance between looking socially appropriate yet still 'individual'. The act of dressing is therefore an explicit moment of articulation between the social and the individual, where social expectations and personal preferences conjoin. As she is assembling a new outfit, the moment becomes anguished because there is no pre-defined look she can fall back on, as she is faced with an entire wardrobe of possibilities. This concern is exacerbated by the perceived splendour of the shoes, as she worries nothing will be able to live up to them and she will fail to make the appropriate combinations. Sadie's clear sense of 'what goes' serves to delimit the possible combinations. Once each item is decided upon, there is a clear logical consequentiality in terms of how each subsequent selection is made. Different tops bring out the colour and texture of the shoes in different ways, which is further enhanced by the skirt selected.

The account of Sadie selecting an outfit described above is taken from my fieldwork and exemplifies many of the negotiations women have to make when choosing what to wear. The act of getting dressed takes place at least once a day and, as such, is ubiquitous and experienced by all women irrespective of age, occupation, sexuality, religion, ethnicity or interest in clothing. Given the primacy of clothing in demarcating gender and the specific status of women in relation to fashion and consumption, I have chosen to focus my research specifically on women. As this moment is both omnipresent and brings together the social and personal, 'getting dressed' forms the empirical focus of this thesis. These dilemmas over what to wear were by far the most important and dominant aspects of my fieldwork. As Sadie's example makes apparent, concerns over what to wear are not only

choices over items of clothing, but materialize fundamental social and existential concerns. It is the moment when women have to negotiate their bodies, sexuality, respectability, style, status, and their self-perception. As recent academic accounts of fashion and clothing suggest, clothing is firmly situated in social, cultural and economic contexts (Breward, 2003) and embodied contexts of wearing (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001). Dressing has wider ramifications than which colours go together. However, clothing does not merely represent these other, more important concerns as it is precisely through its materiality that clothing becomes so existentially important. As worn next to the body, every single day, clothing becomes inseparable from the person; it encodes both how women feel and how they perceive the judgments of others.

The significance of clothing is currently recognized in the proliferation of accounts from a range of disciplines: from the perspectives of marketing and manufacture (Burns, 2002), textiles (Gale and Kaur, 1994), advertising (Diamond, 1999), practices of shopping (Clarke, 2000), and wearing clothing (Holliday, 2001). Given the diverse and complex arena of fashion, existing both as a fragmented global industry and the domain through which identity construction becomes possible, such diverse accounts are certainly valid. However, there remains a blind-spot to the act of dressing, which in many ways is the most important moment empirically. Current accounts of the dressed body, which look at the phenomenological aspects of clothing, point to the importance of the experiences of wearing clothing (Entwistle, 2000). A parallel development is the emphasis on clothing at rest, within the wardrobe (Cwerner, 2001). The act of getting

dressed forms the logical union of these two academic developments: how outfits arise from the wardrobe to constitute the dressed body.

'The problem of what to wear' (Tarlo, 1996: 1) forms the focus of Tarlo's ethnographic and historical account of dress in the Indian context. Given that identities are multiple and conflicting, what to wear becomes a dilemma, which involves political and social considerations. Implicit within this account is the need to investigate how these dilemmas are enacted in the act of getting dressed. As such, the focus of this thesis is this daily 'wardrobe moment', yet in the context of contemporary Britain. This 'wardrobe moment', which is experienced at least once a day, mediates clothing as appearance management and public display and the private, intimate domain of the bedroom and wardrobe. When the outfit is worn, unless it proves to be a failure, all of these anxieties are concealed; it is in the unseen domain of the bedroom where the anguished moments occur, where women have to ally their naked bodies with the clothing in the wardrobe through the imagined opinions of others. This, often troubling transition, is enabled through the various orders, the relational structures of meaning between items, within the wardrobe. The focus of this research is in part how assemblages are actualised out of the potentials and constraints of the orders of the wardrobe.

The importance of clothing and the act of getting dressed is recognized at an implicit level, as is evident in fiction, for example, in a recent collection of short stories by women writers, mostly novelists, (Dunseath (ed), 1998) where women accord the importance of clothing to mediating loss (Mara, 1998), marking transitional rites of

passage to adulthood (Shields, 1998), entanglements with sexuality (hooks, 1998), and the complex intermeshing relationships between mothers and daughters (Atwood, 1998). Such knowledge ordinarily remains implicit, perhaps unsurprising, given the cultural characteristics of British society where everything happens behind closed doors, with the bedroom – the site for dressing – being the ultimate domain of privacy. In order to carry out this research, it was necessary to attain an extremely significant level of intimacy with women in order that they were comfortable getting dressed and expressing these concerns in front of me. The description of Sadie choosing an outfit that opens this thesis was a moment at which I was present, and characterizes much of the following writing. I carried out an in-depth ethnography over 15 months in both London and Nottingham, which took place primarily in bedrooms. As this moment is so private, it was necessary to be present so often that my presence was no longer alien and intimidating.

Dressing almost always occurs in the bedroom, in front of the wardrobe, yet the outfit being selected will ordinarily be worn in the outside world, in the full view of other people. The unseen act of dressing involves the imagined constructions of the seen outfit. Women also have to negotiate their social roles and therefore public persona. In doing so, dressing in front of the wardrobe and the mirror involves complex processes of projecting the dressed self into the prospective situation. The act of dressing and selecting an outfit involves the dialectical interaction between ‘how I look’ and ‘how I feel’: the experience of being in the clothes, and appearing to others. Despite pervasive popular discourses which point to the superficiality of clothing and fashion, the act of getting dressed does not involve ‘an individual’ enacting personal preferences. The act of dressing often does

occur alone; yet through imagined opinions of others, and internalized social expectations, this moment is fraught with problems in constructing the social self through clothing. It is also the moment where the external influences of social expectations and internal, personal aesthetics articulate. The following research questions emerge from an awareness of dressing starting with the wardrobe and involving the transition from the naked to the clothed body, interactions between the personal and the social:

- what are the 'orders of the wardrobe'?
- do women have a personal aesthetic?
- what are the temporal orders of the wardrobe?
- how do these orders impact upon how assemblages are made?
- what is entailed within the act of getting dressed?
 - how does appearance management articulate with experiential aspects of wearing?
 - how do considerations of the outside world and social contexts impact upon dressing?
- in what ways is the wardrobe an externalization of the diverse facets of the self?
- how does the order presented by the combinatorial potential of the clothes articulate with the sense of order and taste generated by the socialization of the wearer?

Acts of dressing start in front of the wardrobe and culminate in the outfit which is assembled on the woman's body. As such this thesis starts with the wardrobe, as a personal collection – often accumulated throughout a life-time, through to the

considerations of the gaze of others, to external influences, such as fashion. The first chapter explicates the research questions in more depth, and highlights the various theoretical perspectives pertinent to an understanding of both wardrobes, and the act of getting dressed. It considers the cross-cultural literature on the self, in order both to contextualize this research and to explore the ways in which the self may be constructed through clothing. The anthropological literature on clothing and costume history is explored to understand the specific nature of clothing in such constructions. The second chapter delineates the methodological orientations that underpin this research, as well as the precise methods deployed. In order to acquire sufficient depth of understanding of clothing as a contextualised practice, I have carried out an ethnography. I go on to outline the epistemological issues arising from studying women, in such an intimate context. The latter part of chapter 2 introduces the context of the research, in terms of the spatial locations of London and Nottingham, and the specific networks of women with whom I worked. The specific context of this research is, however, individual wardrobes, and as such, I will expand here upon the wardrobe as context: as a specific structure which impinges upon how women organize and order their clothing.

Chapters 3 to 8 are based primarily upon ethnographic case study material. The chapters start with a consideration of the most personal aspects of the wardrobe (as the starting point for getting dressed), as an externalised biography (Chapter 3), as a personal aesthetic (chapter 4), moving towards considerations of external influences of others in the presence of 'the gaze', processes of being looked at, (in Chapter 5). Chapter 6 considers the wardrobe as enmeshed in wider social networks and relationships, as

Chapter 7 considers the wider relationships of the fashion system as these impact upon, and emerge from the wardrobe. Chapter 8 considers the most fundamental emergent theme of my thesis, and order of the wardrobe, which is the division between clothing worn habitually, and clothing that is worn rarely. Underpinning this chapter, and indeed all of the ethnographic chapters, is the extent to which clothing externalises 'the self' and in what particular form. For this reason the chapters move from a focus upon the individual, her biography and aesthetic to the larger context, both social and commercial, that impinges upon them.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider the wardrobe in greater depth. Chapter 3 outlines the temporal orders of the wardrobe and the extent to which the collection of clothing may form an externalized form of biography and memory. Discussed here is the particularity of a biographical self constituted through clothing, rather than verbally or through other material forms. Chapter 4 looks at the structural orders of the wardrobe, with the emphasis being on the links between 'how I look' and 'how I feel', through notions of a personal aesthetic. This chapter raises the possibilities of agency expressed through clothing and the complex ways in which clothing may thwart the wearer's intentions. These two chapters consider the wardrobe as a personal collection; in Chapter 5 the emphasis is upon how these orders are actualized in outfits. Dressing is seen here in terms of the whole process, examining the role of mirrors, photographs and the opinions and 'gaze' of others. Taking contrasting examples of women who construct themselves at 'the surface' and those who do not self-consciously engage with their reflected image, I discuss the implications this has for the relative 'robustness' of the self.

Chapter 6 moves beyond the imagined gaze of others when dressing to considering women as situated in wider social networks. Women are therefore understood not as 'individuals' but as relational; I look at how relationships, or aspects of them, may be embedded in clothing, and through various practices of exchange, such as gifting or swapping. Chapter 7 situates the thesis in the context of the Western fashion system. It is considered as a context that may influence decisions over what to wear, and the potential uncertainties that are produced by swiftly changing fashions. As such, I look at how women negotiate such potential panic produced by uncertainty. Fashion will also be discussed as something that emerges from the wardrobe, and new styles may be created through innovation. The final ethnographic chapter considers the division which underpins all wardrobes encountered in my research; that between habitual wear and non-habitual wear, a division which draws together many of the themes of previous chapters. Here I look at how these two domains come together in the logics of selection, and within the fabric denim (which dominated my fieldwork). I then consider the interlinking issues of conformity and individuality that it raises. In the conclusion I will reconsider the wider theoretical debates in light of the findings of my thesis; in particular I will focus upon the relationship between 'the individual' and 'the social', theories of the self, and how understandings of a material practice may offer an alternative means of understanding biography, relationships and kinship.

Chapter 1: Theoretical approaches to the wardrobe and getting dressed:

The currently blossoming field of fashion and clothing studies would seem to provide clear evidence that fashion is finally being taken seriously within academia. Accounts of fashion and dress proliferate, bearing testament to the centrality of clothing at both a macro level, encapsulating the ambivalences and contradictions of capitalism and modernity (Wilson, 1985), and as existentially fundamental at the level of constructions of selfhood. Moreover such a diversity of accounts, within disciplines as wide-ranging as costume history (Taylor, 2004), anthropology (Eicher, 2001), sociology (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001), history (Breward, 2003) and philosophy (Warwick and Cavallero, 1998), serves as an important redress both to previous academic neglect, and moralising stances. Despite the current emphasis within the literature upon the practices of wearing clothing, the act of getting dressed has not been interrogated. As Gregson and Beale (2004) have rightly pointed out, much of this literature assumes that bodies are dressed, when in fact clothing spends most of its life-span at rest in the wardrobe. The focus of this research is upon the transition between the two points: how stored clothing is selected from its resting place, the wardrobe, and then becomes animated and embodied as items are assembled on the dressed body. Lurking in the shadows behind the clothed people which populate academic writings is the individual's solitary 'wardrobe moment': standing in front of an array of clothing faced with the dilemma over what to wear. This unseen moment is where the anxieties, private insecurities and concerns occur, which do not all form part of the self that is presented in public. It is the moment of articulation between personal preferences and social expectations, which becomes all the more pertinent as the

wider social context is brought into contact with the body. It is this act of getting dressed which forms the focus of this thesis: to interrogate empirically this unseen moment in the bedroom.

As there is no current academic work which engages explicitly and specifically with this topic, I will first outline various theoretical perspectives that are pertinent to an understanding of the wardrobe, the act of dressing, and conceptions of both the self and of clothing. Firstly, the wardrobe will be considered as the context for dressing, as it impacts upon the process of selection. I will explore the possibility that the wardrobe may be an external form of the ambivalent and contradictory aspects of the self as constituted biographically and relationally. Arising from this, one of my research questions is the extent to which women 'see' themselves in their wardrobes. From the potentials of the wardrobe, the act of dressing involves particular constructions of the self through clothing. This raises a more general theoretical aim of this thesis: to understand the relationship between the wardrobe in its totality and the transitory, temporary concretization of the self through dressing. In order to understand whether the wardrobe, and indeed outfits, may constitute aspects of the self in an external form, it is necessary to investigate various relevant theoretical perspectives on both the self, and how this may be constituted materially. Rather than merely reduce 'the self' to the dominant Western discourses, the ways in which it may be constituted through practice will be looked at through understandings of cross-cultural perspectives on the self, which offer alternative perspectives of: the multiple and contradictory possibilities of the self, and how this may be constituted materially and at 'the surface'.

As 'the self' is being considered as externalized through a particular material form, I will also aim to understand the specificities of clothing. Considerations of clothing and fashion in a Western context tend to take for granted the materiality of clothing; therefore I will draw from costume history and outline a material culture approach to the study of wardrobes. In order to understand clothing as a lived artifact, and not as existing purely in museums and at rest, I will draw from the literature which considers the practices that pertain to clothing. As this thesis is not a study of 'fashion' but rather of clothing, I will draw from the cross-cultural literature on clothing in order to understand both how it has been theorized, and the potentialities of clothing. Often concerns addressed in the anthropological literature, pertaining to ownership, biography and sociality, are absent from the literature on fashion. I will finally consider the context for this research, part of which is 'fashion', and how this might impact upon the wardrobe, in order to situate my research.

Wardrobes: the context for getting dressed

The wardrobe is both an architectural structure which houses clothing, and the totality of clothing a person owns; the wardrobe will be understood here primarily in terms of the latter usage, as clothing spills out of the wardrobe onto a chair at the end of the bed, linen baskets, under the bed and into the wardrobes of children, partners and friends. The physical container of clothing is relevant in terms of how this impacts upon the storage of clothing and in turn how selections are then made. Wardrobes are a fundamental moment in the life-trajectories of clothing. Once purchased, clothing spends most of its time either

at rest in the wardrobe (Cwerner, 2001) or at some point within the household as part of domestic consumption practices. Gregson and Beale (2004) rightly critique accounts of the wardrobe (Banim et al, 2001) which look at it only as a static repository of items accumulated over a lifetime, rather than as the fulcrum for dynamic domestic processes of sorting, tidying and laundering. However, the wardrobe needs to be considered both in terms of the items that hang as mementoes, yet also as the context for getting dressed: how the pre-existing orders of the wardrobe affect how assemblages are made. One of the main aims of this research is to understand how the wardrobe may form an externalisation of the self, and how this interacts with specific moments of materialisation of the self through worn outfits.

Clothes as a personal aesthetic: the structural orders of the wardrobe:

As is evident from the example of Sadie selecting an outfit with which I began this thesis, women have a clear sense of what items 'go' together. In the act of selecting an outfit, the wardrobe does not consist of a range of isolated unconnected items. Individual items derive their significance from the orders within the wardrobe, where the orders are understood as relational structures of meaning. Such orders may be based upon colours, textures, fashions, functionality, emotive states, spatial domains or social roles. I am therefore aiming to delineate women's perception of what 'goes' together, through the internal coherence of the wardrobe and the categories of meaning. This notion of order draws heavily from structuralist thought. Although structuralist accounts of fashion are extremely problematic, in assuming clothes are a text and that the signifiers are arbitrary, given that clothing is concerned with assemblage, the focus upon the relations between

items is particularly pertinent. McCracken (1990) points to the need to understand the complementarity of goods, the ways in which goods acquire their meaning in relation to other items (Sahlins, 1976). For example, work on colour (Gage, 1993) points to the way in which colours acquire a different tone and vividness dependent upon which colour they are placed next to. This can also be applied to texture of clothing, or the cut and style.

However, given the multiple possible bases for the order of the wardrobe, my analysis marks a point of departure from more rigid structuralist accounts, as there are multiple potential starting points for orders of meaning. This leads to a more multi-faceted and dynamic account of overlapping orders within the wardrobe. For example a top may be selected based upon its colour, as it 'goes' with another item, yet simultaneously if it is a 'work' top it may have to be rejected as it is inappropriate to another social occasion. This sense of order can be abstracted from observations of which particular items of clothing are grouped together. There are several accounts of the overall 'fashion' system (Barthes, 1985), in terms of such structures of meaning; however here one of the aims is to see to what extent women have their own fashion systems, looking from the point of view of the women themselves. Such orders are clearly not only idiosyncratic individual systems, and as such many external influences come into play such as wider social expectations over what is acceptable wear.

The wardrobe as a whole will be considered as a toolkit from which items may be selected to create an outfit. When Sadie is selecting items, she looks at all the clothing

within it as potential items to be selected, as a fluid collection of clothing. The wardrobe is analogous to the bricoleur's tool kit: (Levi-Strauss, 1966) a collection of accumulated items from previous occasions. Women may create connections and assemble looks based upon an array of clothing in the wardrobe. However, within this there are often more rigidly defined separate nodules; for example those which correspond to work clothing or other social roles. Goffman (1971) in discussing the presentation of the self in everyday life looks at how part of such enactment is through clothes. As Nippert-Eng (1996) points out people, through material objects, are able to separate out life domains, as 'territories of the self'. This raises the issue of whether there are distinct domains which correspond to such roles within the wardrobe or whether these roles are part of an overall coherence within which 'roles' fit. This invariably will differ dependent upon individual women, and the type of life-style they lead.

The extent to which the wardrobe is ordered into defined nodules, or as a more fluid entity full of possible future connectivities, has clear implications for the moment of dressing. As a means of dealing with potential panics over what to wear, the presence of defined orders may be useful in mediating such moments. Such predetermined orders may be constraining if an occasion calls for a new or dynamic outfit, as women become entrapped within pre-existing outfits. Perceptions of what items or colours go together may be both helpful in limiting what outfits are possible from the wardrobe, yet simultaneously may be tyrannical. McCracken (1990) points out that the implication of such 'complementary goods' may prevent any purchases which are out of synch with a particular sense of order. McCracken cites the example of Diderot who was given a

scarlet dressing robe as a gift. Once he possessed this, everything else appeared shoddy and inadequate so he ended up replacing all of his belongings. This is particularly useful in highlighting the importance of seeing how socialisation through taxonomy may lead to a clearly demarcated implicit categorisation in the wardrobe. Such an example however does imply a single order or aesthetic, whereas in actuality these 'unities' are overlapping, and may also shift and be disrupted by particular social occasions such as going out with particular people.

Interrogating the personal aesthetics of the wardrobe does not solely involve delineating the material logics of what 'goes' together in the manner of costume history, but it is also taken in terms of what 'feels' right. As such, the various ways in which the wardrobe, as a unique and particular collection, may be seen to externalise the self will be considered. Given that the wardrobe consists of a range of the same type of thing (clothing), within which there are various sub-categorisations, it is apparent that the wardrobe constitutes a particular kind of collection. Writing on collections, Belk has suggested that they form part of the 'extended self', as a kind of 'self-completion' (1995: 90). This is particularly applicable to clothing as it is worn on the body, and becomes literally an extension of the body and the self. The form by which clothing externalises the self is materially particular; most collections are characterised by their 'non-use' (Belk, 1995). However, whilst the wardrobe does contain unworn items, the majority of items either are currently being worn or have been worn. As such, the relationship between the clothing that hangs in the wardrobe, like a collection, and between clothing as worn is particularly pertinent. What defines the majority of collections is their exclusivity, pursued by a group of

enthusiasts; whereas the wardrobe is something shared by everyone. The particularities of the aesthetic become paramount in making the wardrobe particular and unique: it is the possession and wearing of clothing over time that serves to singularise what is usually a former commodity (Kopytoff, 1986: 61). It is the histories of wearing and the ways in which items are combined that make a wardrobe unique.

Gell's notion of a distributed personhood (1998:21), wherein selfhood is externalised and distributed in space through different material objects, is also useful here. As a collection of items of clothing, the wardrobe can be seen as such an externalisation of selfhood. Gell (1998) refers to individual style (as opposed to generic artistic styles) as 'personhood in aesthetic form' (1998:157). In this instance, the personal aesthetic I will be interrogating is the palette from which women paint themselves daily, which may be both restricting and enabling when it comes to the assemblage of outfits. In dressing, the daily creation of such 'art works' becomes a medium through which women's intentions are externalised into a form by which they can impact upon the will of others. As such, clothing may be a form through which women attempt to convince others that they are a particular kind of person. Following Gell, the items of clothing are not viewed as passive objects utilised by autonomous individuals, but rather are fundamental to the mediation and externalisation of agency. Writing on art collectors, Baudrillard (1981) has pointed out that the art lover has to believe 'he is the equal of the canvas itself' (1981: 118). When applied to clothing, not only does the clothing have to be good enough for the occasion and the person, the person has to live up to the item of clothing, which becomes even more poignant a

concern, as the item not only hangs unseen in the wardrobe, but is also displayed on the body.

The notion of a personal aesthetic demarcating an individual style against a backdrop of broader genres is particularly translatable to the wardrobe: as a personal collection that articulates with fashions and social expectations. The wardrobe as a distributed object involves a balance between both external and internal factors. Possible external constraining factors would be: the fluctuations of fashion, ideal images of womanhood as presented in the media, retail influences, and social roles women are expected to occupy. However, the clothing is selected by individual women with particular biographies, personality and body shapes and are therefore unique collections. The biographical aspect is crucial in understanding how women's sense of order is concretised through socialisation.

Temporal orders of the wardrobe:

Aesthetic preferences are cultivated over periods of time; as an accumulation of items often over the lifecourse, the temporal and structural orders of the wardrobe intersect. The temporal orders are multiple and overlapping, consisting of: the external vagaries of fashion, normative expectations, the inherent aging of clothing, and indeed personal temporalities, such as remembrances of wearing. One aspect of the temporality of the wardrobe is that it may also contain discarded or former selves (Banim and Guy, 2001); clothes that are no longer worn, but have not been thrown out, perhaps serve as inalienable mementoes of former selves. This raises the possibility that the wardrobe can

be seen to form a kind of externalised biography; as Levi-Strauss comments of the bricoleurs tool-kit, it forms 'fossilised evidence of the history of an individual or a society' (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 22). Clothes may represent either previous periods of an individual's life or encode specific events that are definitive in an individual's biography, or indeed items that have yet to be worn, where clothing involves the projections of an aspirant self (Clarke, 2001) into the future. Therefore one of the questions this research addresses is to understand the ways in which biography and personal memories may be present within clothing in the wardrobe. As clothing is discarded or consciously kept, the wardrobe can be seen to form part of the ordering of memories. Giddens (1991) has suggested that the potentially disordering aspects of everyday life demand that we establish a sense of temporal order. Narratives of the self are a means of establishing biographical continuity and a stability in the present, in the face of the 'chaos' of everyday life. Through ordering their clothing, women are also ordering their lives, through the reconstruction of their past and a projection into the future, to create a current coherence. As such, the wardrobe may form an attempt to engage with this construction of a self-narrative; as 'bad' memories through clothing are thrown out, and successful 'former' selves are still retained and hang in the wardrobe.

Characteristic of biography, as exemplified by Giddens's discussion, is its unilinear temporal trajectory. The wardrobe also offers an alternative reading of this trajectory of the self, as biography through clothing is not necessarily based upon this temporally coherent narrative. One of the aims of this thesis is to understand how, through its materiality, a biography through clothing might differ from verbal narratives of the self.

One of the defining material propensities of clothing is its sensuality and tactility; factors which are crucial to the ways in which clothing may act as 'packages of memories' (Belk, 1995: 92). Clothing that is kept, but no longer worn, may serve as a means of accessing memories that would otherwise be forgotten. Touching an item may serve to aid the woman's memory of what it felt like to wear that item, and, as such, what it felt like to be that person. On going through their collections, Belk notes (1995) that the majority of collectors are able to describe in exact detail where they were when they bought the item in question (Belk, 1995). In the case of clothing it is not the act of purchase which is important, but the sensual experiences of wearing. Such acts of wearing are not only confined to the past, as many 'former' items may be worn again, and reintroduced into the active cycles of clothing. In acts of creating a new assemblage, 'former' items may become part of a contemporary identity, clearly problematising notions of linear coherence.

Getting dressed – acts of translation:

If the wardrobe as a personal aesthetic does indeed constitute an externalization of the various facets of the self, then of interest here is how particular outfits that are selected may materialize the self (or a dimension of it), albeit transitorily. The act of getting dressed is never free and unconstrained, women have to balance creativity with dominant modes of representation (Pollock, 1987) and indeed constraints, such as financial resources or body shape. Despite such constraints, the wardrobe may be a possible domain for creativity, as these items can be put together to create an individual look. The very fact that women feel they have to construct a self through clothing may in itself be a

constraint, as women are expected to have a coherent self to 'express' (Giddens, 1991, Belk, 1995). Such a pressure accounts in part as to why the act of getting dressed may be so anguished. The 'self', and this pressure to have one, and express it, is a particular historical and cultural construction; the particular ways in which this discourse emerges, and the nature of contemporary Western burdens on the self will be considered later. Here, I will first look at how the act of dressing and of trying on outfits becomes part of this creation of the self.

Miller's concept of objectification (1987), derived from Hegel, is a particularly useful way of understanding dressing as a series of externalizations. For Hegel, objectification is part of the process of the development of self-consciousness: wherein the subject becomes aware of itself as an 'other', an object. As the subject becomes aware of this process, the subsequent dissatisfaction with the self-as-object in turn leads to the reintegration of this externalization within the self, which is therein changed. The process is therefore progressive and constitutive of the subject, rather than merely being a reflective externalization. Fundamental to the development of the self is this positing the self as an object, the awareness of the self-as-other, in turn leading to awareness of the self. Miller defines objectification as 'a dual process by means of which a subject externalizes itself in a creative act of differentiation, and in turn re-appropriates this externalization through an act which Hegel terms sublation' (1987:28). Miller concretizes and particularises this concept, by pointing to ways in which this moment of the externalization of the self may happen through objects, and as such is made possible through particular material forms.

This notion of the creation and development of the self as both a process and as happening through material forms carries particular pertinence for the act of getting dressed. What emerges from studying women's wardrobes and the selection of outfits is that 'the self' is not something pre-existing and fixed, but rather clothing becomes a particular medium through which the self may be discovered and indeed created, evidenced in the ubiquitous question 'is this me?' Outfits are not therefore necessarily being selected to 'express' a pre-existing self as is often assumed, but rather the self is being constituted and 'tried on' in this process. In dressing women stand in front of a wardrobe full of a range of possibilities; from this an outfit is selected which women then consider 'is this me'. This 'me' being a constant, but is dependent upon where the woman is going, or who with. Despite women talking about an outfit being 'really me', in actuality this self is plural.

When women try on an outfit, usually looking at their reflection in the mirror, they are considering themselves as an object. Analogous to Miller's conceptualization of objectification, here women see them 'selves' as external; such a moment is necessary to consider whether this particular outfit is a suitable externalization of the self. When women look at the items before them or at their reflection they are aware of, and engaged in, this process of externalizing the self. Whilst looking out at the mirror or item of clothing, they are in fact looking inwards to see if it 'is me', or if 'I can be that person'. The way in which the self becomes an object is very particular through clothing, as this moment of consideration is often mediated through the imagined gaze of others: both as a

generic gaze (Edholm, 1992), and through the specified gaze of individuals. As such, women are always relational, and means of looking are often intersubjective.

G. H. Mead is particularly useful when referring to how the self is constituted relationally, through seeing the self as others see it. Consciousness of the self emerges as an 'an awareness of the self in relation to others' (1982: 46). Through observations of how others respond to our language and gestures, the self is set up as an object, seen in the third person. The self emerges in conjunction with other selves. This corresponds with William James' 'looking-glass 'I'' (1961), as the awareness of how others see you, in turn affects how the self is constructed. This idea can be used in tandem with the moment of objectification where the self is seen as other (Miller, 1987), in order to show the specific, material means through which this may happen, partly mediated through the constructed gaze of others. Mead refers to the relationship between the 'I' and the 'me' (1982: 102), when the self is looking upon itself as an object, it is the 'I' that perceives the 'me': the 'I' is trying to see the 'me' as others see it. These perceptions are a product of social interaction. The relationship between the self-as-object and self-as-observer is apparent in the act of dressing; when women look at the items of clothing, or at their reflection in the mirror, 'I' am trying to imagine how others see 'me'. Dressing involves constructions of different scenarios through outfits as seen through such objectified gazes. This aspect of Mead's theory is extremely useful in understanding how women may look at themselves through the eyes of others and how such objectification may be a fundamental part of dressing: in considering the mirror's reflected image.¹

¹ However using this notion does not involve a complete adherence to Mead's theory, as inter-subjective encounters cannot be presumed to precede acts of dressing; the gaze is not always mediated through the

The final stage of dressing involves the outfit being worn on the body, and can be understood through the final stage of Millers' theory of objectification, wherein the self-as-object is then reintegrated within the self. With clothing, this takes on a particular resonance. As the clothing is actually worn on the body, as a kind of prosthesis, or as if part of the skin, the wearer and the outfit may become fused. As objectification is a process, a fundamental part of which is the separation of subject from object – there lies within it the possibility for failure: that the person cannot live up to the items of clothing, or that the item will betray the wearer. The act of wearing becomes the moment when the outfit is tested out; if it is successful, and the wearer is 'comfortable' then the self has been constituted successfully through its externalization as there is an aesthetic 'fit'.

However, the potential for failure is immense; when coupled with the burdens on successfully 'expressing your self', there is little wonder the act of dressing becomes such an anxious act. This experience of failure occurs not only in public as often getting dressed involves the trying on of a succession of failed outfits. The individual thinks they know who they are and how they can look, yet they then look at themselves in the mirror only to see themselves as deluded, as this is not 'me' at all. At this moment women certainly do not feel they are simply expressing themselves; on the contrary they are going through a long list of failed attempts before they find themselves.

gaze of others. Furthermore, Mead bases his intersubjectivity on language and gestures; yet for dressing, what really matters is how the item appears and feels. Clothing involves a complex dialectic between how items feel – sensations of wearing, and how the items appear to others

Historical and social specificity of discourses on the self:

One of the aims of this thesis is to look at the ways in which clothing may externalize the self, and the act of dressing as part of this act of externalization. The self discussed thus far is as it emerges from my fieldwork, and rather than being a universal psychological self that is being 'expressed', this self as constituted through clothing is culturally specific. Whilst my primary focus is the practices which form part of this constitution of the self, as clothing is grounded in the ways in which the self and surface are conceptualized (Sennett, 1971), such practices occur in the context of dominant discourses on the self. The Western discourse of the self emerges in historically and culturally specific ways, involving fundamental Western conceptions of the person, and issues pertaining to the surface: the relationship between inner and outer. It is therefore pertinent here to explicate possible bases for Western conceptions of the person and the self, in order to contextualize this research.

Mauss (1985) discusses the historical development of different meanings attached to the term person, culminating in the contemporary form. Starting with the Greek origins of the word - meaning 'mask' Mauss points out that the word also carried connotations of the dramatic part, person and frame, and that the Latin '*persona*' has similar implications. As Mauss points out, the Romans also developed a distinct notion of 'personnage' – defined as a mask of trickery, which comes to stand in opposition to the self. In his discussion of masks Napier (1985) points out that our notions of the distinction between this outer mask and the 'real person' had their roots thus sown in Roman times. However the current ontological separation between an internal authentic essence of the person, as

opposed to transient and 'false' appearances becomes increasingly concrete from Mediaeval times, tracing back to St Augustine – wherein the mask merely becomes an appendage – with no connection to the inner essence (Napier, 1985:14). One of the key implications of this ontological shift is that the surface becomes equated with lack of importance. The real authentic self is seen in metaphysical terms, and accordingly issues surrounding appearance and the surface are seen as inconsequential.

Such perceptions are historically entrenched and, along with post-enlightenment dichotomies of rationality/irrationality and body/mind, became tied to the moralising debates surrounding the rise of consumer society in inextricably gendered ways. The abstract notions of the self and person become concretized as they intersect with actual processes. The fickle ephemerality of fashion as a feminised phenomenon emerged as such in historically and culturally specific ways as part of the emergent Western capitalist market exchange system. From the early 18th century De Grazia (1996) points to how a particular pattern of consumption emerged, developing around the bourgeois household, with middle class women's lack of participation in wage labour being a central factor in defining the family. Continuing through into the 19th century, women were compelled to invest their time in adorning themselves and the home (Auslander, 1996).

From the 19th century onwards wage labour comes to be seen as irrevocably male, with wages being calculated upon the assumption that men provided for children alone, obscuring women's role in providing for and socialising the child. Such an obfuscation also entailed calculating a wage based upon subsistence, lest women squandered wages

(De Grazia, 1996) as there was no arena to theorise the household or consumption. This invisibility of the domestic sphere was exacerbated by the emergence of the public sphere, as separate from work or the household, resulting in the latter being seen as particularised or private interests. This division of labour becomes even more firmly articulated in the early 20th century, with the 'invention' of the male bread-winner (De Grazia, 1996). This coincides with an emphasis on the 'art of being a woman' (Wilson, 1985:123), as women were called upon to construct their individuality, yet simultaneously conform to a category or type where personality and appearance are supposed to coincide. In such a climate women become valorised through their capacity to appear, in opposition to men, who are positioned as primary viewers (Berger, 1972). Rather than such a process being a leisure activity or play, in fact these practices were 'gruelling work' (Wilson, 1985: 122).

Therefore, emergent consumer society comes to be seen as feminised, in opposition to production, wherein value is alleged to lie. Furthermore, such a dichotomy is tagged onto other oppositions in the ensuing moralising debates. In particular, feminist critiques of fashion and make-up were centred on the need to reject the 'false' mask of femininity (Daly, 1979) to get to 'real women's values, as if there is a deep 'reality of the female self' as opposed to 'patriarchally imposed, self-denying masks' (Daly, 1979:27). As Hollows (2000) points out, this not only denigrates the surface but furthermore assumes that there can be an authentic self outside of, and underpinning culture. The uniqueness of human beings is largely characterised by their existence in 'culture'; the intrinsic paradox of invocations to a return to 'nature' in the domain of fashion and make-up, becomes

apparent. Strathern (1979) similarly suggests that such condemnation assumes that since all that is being made up is the body, processes of making up do not concern the self. Such criticisms of fashion, make-up and clothing as superficial are therefore tied into broader critiques of consumption as corrupting, portraying individuals as passive dupes (Hall, 1981).

However, at the level of practice, it is apparent that practices surrounding clothing and consumption are not necessarily superficial. An abundance of writings have reinstated consumption as being a central arena for the creation of value and identity construction (Miller, 1987). Accounts of grounded provisioning within the household (Devault, 1991, Vickery, 1998), further challenge notions of consumption as being superficial. However, there is a lack of focus upon participation in clothing in such grounded accounts, which merely serves to reinforce that this must necessarily be superficial. As such it is something I aim to redress. Accounts which point to the problematics of appearance, where the self is potentially located yet simultaneously recognised as constructed (Sennett, 1971, Peiss, 1996), suggest that a deeper understanding of surface and appearance is necessary.

The construction of appearance does, however, take place in the context of overarching ideas that women should 'appear' (Berger, 1972) and yet simultaneously, by engaging in such acts women are positioned as superficial. In part, this is the reason for focusing upon women in this thesis. I am aware of the dearth of research on male consumers of fashion (Breward, 1999), but I have chosen to interrogate gender in relation to women because,

as the previous section has demonstrated, historically women have been positioned discursively and actually as primary consumers. There is a plentiful array of work which makes apparent that at the level of contemporary practice such a link still holds (Miller, 1998, Campbell, 1996, Wilson, 1985, Wilson and de la Haye, 1999)². However, in selecting women I do not want to pre-assume that from this category their experiences can be read off, nor that they will be uniform. Subjectivity is also related to class (Skeggs, 1997), ethnicity (Kahn, 1993), family position (Hollows, 2000), occupation (Entwistle, 1997) and gender which intersects with other categories: 'if one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is' (Butler, 1990:3). This is particularly pertinent given that my research mostly took place in the extremely diverse, multicultural site of London. Furthermore, these are not identities or subjectivities as such, but rather parameters of identity which intersect, channelling access to resources and as ways of being. Using Bourdieu's multifaceted notion of capital (economic, educational resources, cultural knowledges such as where to shop) Skeggs asserts that all such categories are 'relations in which capitals come to be organised and valued' (1997: 9).

Social individuals:

My argument about the historical construction of gendered selves indicates that the origins of the 'person' and the 'self' are not psychological, innate categories, but arise in particular social contexts. Even though concerns over the person and having a 'sense of self' are culturally ubiquitous (Carrithers, 1985), 'the self' is a socially constructed category and takes on a particular form in historical and social contexts. Recognition of

² There are also many practical issues as to why women were selected, as my fieldwork involves watching women get dressed. This will be discussed more in the next chapter.

these social constructions does not mean that the social is assumed to exist a priori to the self or individual. Anthropological accounts which position individuals as representations of particular social categories or roles within a social structure (such as Levi-Strauss, 1969, Leach, 1970) leave no room for acts of individual self-constructions. Individuals exist only as instances of particular cultural categories. Yet, in choosing to investigate individual women's wardrobes, rather than women within a pre-defined community, this does not signify the opposite tendency: wherein the psychological individual and subjectivities are seen to exist prior to cultural constructs and categories. The problem which this research addresses is the relationship between the individual and the social context through which the relational self comes to be externalised through clothing.

Tarlo's account of clothing dilemmas in both rural and urban Indian contexts (1996) challenges the idea that predefined identities are 'expressed' through clothing. In a context with clearly demarcated caste divisions, she demonstrates that the relationship between caste and clothing is far more contested. Rather than being predefined, the ways individuals may recombine items entails the casting aside, and rediscovery, of new identities. Caste status is not the only consideration, the 'problem of what to wear' being also informed by considerations of age, marital status, where you are from (as part of an urban elite or not). Clothing choices are both constrained by particular social expectations, yet still through the act of dressing and assemblage there is space for contestation. This is particularly useful for this research, as implicit within this account is that identities are created and externalised in particular ways through clothing, and are thus not just a secondary reflection.

The two main ways in which the relationship between the social and individual will be considered here are: firstly that through socialisation individuals acquire certain structural dispositions, and secondly how in the act of dressing considerations of the social context mean the outside is 'let in'. Firstly, the social only exists as it is actualized through the practices and agency of individuals; the individual does not exist outside culture, but rather is socialized into it and thus has particular dispositions towards acting in certain ways. Bourdieu develops the notion of structured dispositions towards action through the concept of 'habitus' (1977) – as a balance between structure and agency. Habitus is a 'system of lasting transposable dispositions, which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions...' (Bourdieu, 1977: 83). This is tied to social positioning, constituted through different fields, such as: education, home and economic position. Thus women's structured dispositions are framed by social and cultural factors, mediated through family upbringing. In this way women may have particular orientations to clothing and preferences, yet particular clothing practices are not determined. Such structured dispositions are open to change, in particular through clothing, given that assemblages are made every day. Much contemporary feminism is characterised by paradigms pointing to the performativity of gender (Butler, 1990, 1993) which occurs in the context of normative expectations regarding gender roles. Through mundane and repetitive acts such roles come to appear naturalised. Even women who wear the same types of clothing every day, and have conformist shopping patterns, reinforce these patterns through daily acts of dressing. Clothes form part of such performativity in that wearing certain outfits is

done in a climate of social expectations regarding correct dress codes and furthermore conforming involves a citation of the norm. In terms of women's identities, in Butler's model individuals are both subjected to the norms of femininity but furthermore are 'subjectivated' (Butler, 1993: 535) by them also, through repetitive and mundane acts. Therefore, it is through such norms, and other cultural categories, that action is not determined, but is the potential domain for agency.

The individual and social intersect through practices of socialization through repetitive acts. Such a process is well documented by commentators as diverse as Bourdieu (1977) and Butler (1990), and the relationship between 'the social' and 'the individual', between structure and agency, is a central one in the social sciences. These debates acquire a particular resonance when seen in the act of dressing, as when the 'self' is externalized through clothing, the 'outside' is let in. Dressing involves considerations of whether clothing is socially suitable for the occasion, the age, status and occupation of a woman; in turn this has to be balanced with whether a woman feels an item 'is her'. Dressing involves the explicit conjunction of 'the social' and 'the individual': the construction of the self through socially acceptable modes of dressing. As such, notions of roles and expectations are negotiated with items that touch the body and it is impossible for such concerns to remain entirely social.

Mead's notion of the 'social individual' (1982: 102) encapsulates the aspect of the relationship which shows how dressing may involve the self-conscious reflexive process of the construction of the self, through the eyes of others. The 'I' takes the position of

how both specified and generic others will see the 'me'; as such, women are always relational in positioning themselves as viewers of them selves. My work seeks to bring the specificities of gender to this analysis. The 'I' is a social self, as it is constructed through the gaze of others and learnt, internalized social expectations. This notion of internalization helps to account for many acts of dressing which are non-reflexive.

Still Mead contends that no two people constitute the social in the same way; as the 'I' can never be known (in being known it becomes a 'me'), it is also the domain of spontaneity and individuality. The relationship between the social and individual is integrative; there is no separate 'reality' prior to, or distinct from, social expectations or roles. Social expectations exist through individual enactments, as everyday reality and conduct '...is an imitation of the proprieties, a gesture at the exemplary forms and the primal realization of these ideals belongs more to make believe than to reality' (Goffman, 1974:562). Cultural standards are an integral part of everyday reality. Therefore, rather than there being a real self that is separate from or prior to anything else, the self is created and performed through unique cultural enactments. Thus Goffman defines the self as 'a changeable formula for managing oneself during events' (1974:573).

The 'deep surface' of clothing:

If the self is neither an entirely social construction, nor a unique pre-social individual, the question then becomes how the self is constituted socially yet as a unique being. The empirical focus of this thesis is how the self as a social individual is constructed specifically through clothing, in the act of dressing the body. Although there is an

abundance of writings upon how clothes are linked to identity, such treatises are often firmly entrenched within subject: object dualities, seeing the clothes merely as passive receptacles for conveying a message. I seek to bridge this divide. The reduction of clothing to its capacities as a communicative 'text' forms part of the enduring legacy of semiotics (ensuing from Barthes, 1985). Such approaches fail to take account of the material propensities of clothing, and the ways in which clothing may be co-agentic in the construction of selves.

As such, clothing is not seen as a secondary representation of the self, but rather as fundamental to its constitution. The 'surface', far from being secondary and superficial, may in fact be the site of transformation. Wigley (1995) discusses the paradox of the white wall in architecture: it is seen as being transparent and neutral to allow the 'real' structure to show though, yet in fact is a central constituent in the transformation of the structure. When Le Corbusier wanted to create a fundamental architectural change in developing modernist architecture, he did so by focusing upon how the walls were painted, before even attempting to address the internal structure (Wigley, 1995). Here the surface and the outer image are a central part of the object itself and transformations. Such a notion of the transformatory potentials of the surface is particularly fruitful when applied to clothes. Rather than see such a link to the surface as being necessarily a connotation of superficiality, the clothes may be part of fundamental conceptions of self, and agents of transformation. Physically clothes are a means of modifying the body: holding in certain areas, amplifying others.

If the surface may be a site for transformation, implicit within this is that through the agency of clothing, as the self to be constructed is not merely 'freely' chosen, the surface may also be the domain for failure. As Wigley (1995) comments, the white paint started to chip off Le Corbusier's walls and the illusion of technological modernism peeled away with it. Similarly with clothes, the heel of a shoe may fall off and the elegant identity the individual wishes to project comes tumbling down. Clothes do not just express any identity an individual desires. There is a well-documented recognition of economic and social restraints over our ability to freely express our identity (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977), yet this takes the notion of constraint onto another level, leveling a clear challenge to post-modern emphases upon 'everyone can be anyone' (cited in Featherstone, 1991: 82). The potential for the clothing to betray the wearer, for the outfit failing to match the wearer's intentions, accounts in part for why the act of dressing is often so problematic.

In the instances where the outfit doesn't work, and there is an aesthetic disjuncture between the wearer's sense of self and the final outfit, the clothing comes to feel external to the wearer. However, this relationship between clothing and wearer is different when an outfit of clothing is successful, or an outfit is something a woman wears habitually. In these instances there is a fusion between wearer and clothes; in keeping with Gell's notion of distributed personhood, the self can be seen to be extended through the items of clothing. The lack of distinction between objects and persons is evidenced cross-culturally. La Fontaine (1985) takes the example of four territorially diverse societies (in Ghana, Uganda, Kenya and Highland New Guinea), which are all characterized by their conceptualization of human beings as 'composite creations...composed of material and

immaterial components' (1985: 126). For example, for the Gahuku-Gama of Highland New Guinea – the 'material' (incorporating biological aspects and material objects) is key to the human personality. The skin is seen as the locus for the incorporation of social roles, and where an individual's characteristics are located.

The notion that the surface may be the locus for social roles and fundamental aspects of the self is particularly pertinent to this thesis, given the prevalent associations of clothing with superficiality. This discourse locating clothing and fashion as being superficial and unimportant is pervasive; Strathern's work (1979) on self-decoration in Mount Hagen in Melanesia shows the ethnocentricity of such assertions. Focusing explicitly on the body decorations employed by men on formal ritual occasions, Strathern makes the point that such elaborate make-up is not 'disguise' in our sense of concealing the identity, but rather this is seen to be where the self is displayed - 'bringing things outside' (Strathern, 1979: 249). Attributes of personality are displayed and draped around the body – thus on normal occasions when the self is not being presented thus, these attributes are hidden, 'within the skin, a person's basic capacities' (Strathern, 1979: 249). This example raises the issue not only that the surface may be where the self is articulated, but also that it is not monolithic or unproblematic. Rather than assume that clothes are superficial, my analysis of clothing will involve an understanding of the 'deep' surface.

A central facet of the materiality of clothing is that the construction of appearance involves several layers on top of each other, with underwear at the bottom, perhaps then several other layers of clothes, an overcoat, accessories and make-up, what is actually

constituted by surface comes to be extremely problematic. The array of items in the wardrobe may be actualised in multiple combinations. Analogous to the composition of human skin, with the existence of layers within the skin, with one layer, the dermis, being defined as the 'true' layer of skin, clothes are similarly layered. Furthermore, one of the layers within the skin carries particular connotations of depth and authenticity. Such an analogy is particularly useful when thinking about clothing, with clothing involving many layers, the possibility that women conceptualise an aspect of their outfit as 'really me'. Secondly what this notion of layers within the surface offers is that it is a complex multi-constituted entity. As Young pointed in her study of the colours of clothing (2001) the way in which layering takes place is particularly important – whether visible or invisible. Young also adds another dimension to the notion of layers within the surface, pointing out that colour is in effect another facet within the surface to be considered, another layer. Therefore the surface of clothing involves not only the functionality of what the clothing is (such as a coat) but also a particular colour, style, cut, length.

Whilst the prevailing discourse assumes a coherent single self, at the level of practice through the layering of clothing, it becomes possible to mobilise different facets of the self through a single outfit. Napier makes an explicit contrast between Christian influenced perceptions and pantheistic cultures which have a 'polythetic view of personality' (1985: 28). Multiple personalities are not seen as destructive, rather the masks exploit diverse psychological states, facets of personalities and spiritual forces. Taking the specific example of Hinduism and the wearing of masks in Bali, he shows how these are linked to ambivalent forces within an individual, which are tested out in

ritual contexts by the wearing of different masks. In the Western context such a process would be taken as suggesting split personalities rather than struggles to contain an ambivalence that is foundational. The application of such capacities of masks to clothing usefully highlights the ambivalence between the possibility of the self being expressed through clothing, yet simultaneously being concealed. Masks being 'transparent and opaque' (Brilliant, 1991: 113), point to the equivocation between surface and depth and you may 'reveal by concealing' (Warwick and Cavallero, 1998: 133). Thus a very different notion of the self and personality are apparent. This raises the possibility that items of clothing may be utilised to mobilise different personality traits and, through the ways in which layering takes place, the different possibilities for the self may be explored.

Cross-cultural perspectives on the self and the surface are useful in both relativising and problematising notions of an autonomous immaterial self. Such examples also highlight that notions of the self are diversely constructed: whereas the liberal Western construction of selfhood is highly individual, different cultures may construct self-hood through collectivities and adherence to a shared identity. Whilst such societies clearly have a different notion of 'the self' from Western conceptions, such understandings may be useful in looking at the specific ways in which the self may be constructed through clothing. What emerges from any empirical analysis is that such discourses of the self do not play out at the level of practice in contemporary Britain. In Skeggs' study of white working class women in North West Britain (1997) she highlights that for these women such individualistic narratives are not important. The women's interest rather is based

upon 'fitting in', and being respectable; these women are not free, autonomous and independent selves, but see themselves in terms of their relationships to others, and duties. The 'women live at the surface, in public, because their subjectivity is produced from and for public knowledge' (1997:163). Their subjectivity is visible and constructed through relationships to others. Thus, notions of a self are differential dependent upon gender, class, occupation, family status and are not necessarily produced by Giddens' bourgeois project of the self (1991). Skeggs explicitly uses gender to challenge homogeneous notions of the liberal self. At the level of practice, the ways in which the self may be constituted are more complex and diverse and as such one of the aims of this thesis is to interrogate ways in which 'the self' is constituted through practice.

Anthropological studies of cloth and clothing.

The previous sections raised the possibility that the self may be multiple, and constituted at 'the surface'; such theoretical positions are useful in thinking through how the act of dressing the body may be an act of self-construction. As such, these possibilities and questions need to be considered now in relation to the specificity of clothing. This thesis is based upon contemporary Britain, and therefore takes place in the context of the Western fashion system, yet it is a study of clothing rather than fashionable clothing per se. As such, issues pertinent to the study of clothing are relevant and I will, therefore, first consider the anthropological literature on clothing in order to understand how this has been theorized. What is problematic about much that is written about clothing in a context such as Britain, is that fashion is often taken as primary; however, what emerged from my fieldwork is that in fact most decisions or concerns women have over clothing

do not centre upon fashion. On an initial survey of the anthropological literature it would seem that discussions such as contestations over ethnicity in Peru (Femenias, 2004) have little to do with women's wardrobes in London. However, whilst the contexts are far removed, what such accounts make apparent is that clothing is situated in particular social, economic and political contexts, and through its material propensities, it articulates social categories such as gender and ethnicity. As Sennett's (1971) historical analysis makes clear, fashion, clothing and appearance are comprehensible not solely as a self-referential system, but should rather be situated in broader social shifts in notions of appearance and self-hood. Such a rooted and contextualised analysis is a unifying feature of much of the cross-cultural literature. In discussions as wide-ranging as contestations over gender and sexuality in Zambia (Hansen, 2004a) and local identities through the cultural biography of *traje* amongst the Maya people of Guatemala (Hendrickson, 1995) clothing is not seen as reflecting and propagating cultural categories and social structures. Rather shifts in understandings of culture as processual and constituted through practice have lead to a focus in recent anthropological accounts on the materiality of clothing (Hansen, 2004b).

One of the first anthropological volumes to focus upon the material potentials of clothing, is an edited volume by Weiner and Schneider (1989), and is based upon an in depth understanding of the properties of cloth and how these encode, reproduce and reveal or conceal social relationships and identities. All the articles within the book base themselves upon an understanding of how the particularities of cloth, such as its porosity, and as something worn by individuals next to the body, lend themselves to certain

cultural categories and identities. Emphasis falls upon the magical properties of clothing: for example, looking through processes of manufacture in Indonesia, Hoskins (1989) points to how spiritual values become woven into the final cloth. Similarly Bayly (1986) writing on India has pointed to how, through such perceived magical qualities of the cloth, the individual who wears such cloth is therein transformed, taking on facets which are materialised within the cloth. Cohn (1991) writes of certain items of clothing as literally embodying authority. Such a possibility of clothing having magical or transformatory potentials is absent from literature of Western clothing; it raises the need to interrogate such 'folk' beliefs pertaining to clothing and the possibility that clothing may have magical properties: such as the 'lucky' interview suit, which when worn may make a woman feel confident and successful, or indeed that on wearing items of clothing, a behavioural change may be enacted in the wearer. Bayly (1986) comments on the particular cultural aesthetic in India wherein certain colours carry particular connotations and lead to certain enhanced states. Likewise here, perhaps the folk beliefs regarding the colour red as carrying connotations of eroticism, makes the wearer feel sexier when wearing the purported item.

Common to these writers, and a theme of the wider anthropological literature on clothing, is that clothing is not 'expressing' a pre-existing category, but rather that the clothing is agentic and transformatory in enacting such changes. This thesis will explore the possibility that ordinary clothing in contemporary Britain is amenable to such an analysis. Another strong theme within the anthropological literature is the notion of the links between materiality, biography, and ownership. Bayly (1986) has suggested that as

clothes are woven the properties of the previous owner will be retained; this capacity to hold former owners within the weave of the cloth is dependent in his example (India) upon the coarseness of the fabric and the size of the knots. Thus, clothes become linked to biographical periodicity, rather than merely a finite notion of durability. Bean (1989) writing on Ghandi, tracks his biography and changing political affiliations through his clothes. The notion of the life-span of cloth is something which has since been expanded in the anthropological literature and is a fruitful line of enquiry (Renne, 1995), seen in particular in tracings of the cultural biography of cloth (Hendrickson, 1995). Although Bean's example (1989) involves a conscious political adoption of clothes to make politicised statements, along with other accounts on temporality and biography, it carries implications for my research project. Seeing as the wardrobe may involve the accumulation of clothes over time, the wardrobe may be a particular material form of externalized biography.

Whilst the anthropological commentary on clothing is extremely diverse, what it shares is the emphasis upon the material propensities on cloth; despite the range of contexts certain themes emerge in common from the literature, which may also be applicable to clothing in my example. As suggested by emphases on biography, as clothing is worn on the body it becomes intimately connected to the wearer. Another facet of the porosity of cloth is that relationships may be embedded materially (Weiner, 1989). Particularly relevant here is the way in which Weiner discusses the processes through which cloth becomes inalienable, when it is maintained through several generations, wherein the cloth becomes irrevocably linked to the descent or lineage group. Cloth here carries the 'histories of past

relationships, making the cloth itself into a material archive' (1989:52). In my research, clothing that is gifted from mothers to daughters, may be an external form of an aspect of a relationship. Clothing, therefore, may be utilized in the negotiation and mediation of relationships, utilized to forge connectivities between women; clothing decisions do not just correlate with an individual's personality as is often assumed.

However, even within Weiner and Schneider's account (1989), such issues are not relevant to clothing in the context of the West. Given the high turnover of clothing in the fashion system, and the massive scale of production, Weiner and Schneider directly contrast Western fashion with small-scale societies (1989:16). Such a characterisation of traditional cloth as carrying depth and value involves here seeing Western clothing as superficial and transient. It is as if as soon as it enters the context of Western fashion, clothing loses its sociality and materiality. Invariably such accounts, as do many others, such as Barnes and Eicher (1992), focus upon gender, and social relations of production and weaving. Whilst valid, such social relations in small-scale societies, should not mean that by implication participation through clothing as consumers entails relationships of ephemerality and superficiality. Thus, this book, as is symptomatic of many other accounts, neglects that clothing in industrial societies is amenable to the same sorts of understanding as cloth is: as a material form that may store relationships, or as transformatory in issues of identity. Current anthropological accounts point more towards global passages and flows of clothing (such as the globalization of Asian dress, Neisson et al, 2003, or circuits of African fashion through Dakar, Nairobi and Los Angeles, Rabine, 2002), and indeed contested and changing identities through clothing. As such,

the emphasis is no longer only on small-scale societies. These global passages of clothing encroach on, and are often driven by, the Western fashion system. Whilst my research is small scale, and situated within particular wardrobes, it draws from such notions of fluidity, and lack of a defined identity that characterized previous accounts of small-scale, clearly defined communities.

Costume history and material culture.

The interest in the material composition of clothing in Britain is not new; since its emergence as a sub-set of art history studies in the Renaissance/Early Modern period (Taylor, 2004) costume history has been dedicated to delineation of the material details and nuances of clothing. However, largely within the domain of museum curatorship, such analyses have, until recently, remained excluded from academic treatises of clothing. In what Taylor terms the 'Great Divide' (2004: 279) between established academic accounts and costume history, the material expertises of dress museum curators have been largely denigrated as merely descriptive (Fine and Leopold, 1993). It is certainly true that until the mid-twentieth century the history of dress rarely moves beyond the material charting of styles. In fact such descriptive, rather than analytic tendencies are still apparent in more recent seminal works, (Laver, 1995, Boucher, 1967). As Breward (2003) points out, such works are extremely useful in pointing to the material evolution of styles in their own right (rather than merely reflecting social changes). Object based approaches (Taylor, 2002) have clear potential, when situated in wider social and cultural contexts, and the implications of form and fabric are understood as co-agentic in processes of identity construction.

Rather than condemn approaches which focus upon material documentation and description, there is a great deal to learn from such expertise. Tarrant (1994) stresses the need for an in-depth understanding of cut and construction as a crucial counterweight to purely academic approaches which are 'contorted to some theory without a basic understanding of the properties of cloth and the structure of clothes' (1994: 12). In a similar vein Breward (2003) highlights the absence of the physical form and structure of the clothing product from writings about the fashion system, as the focus becomes instead upon fleeting meanings that briefly reside in items of clothing. Rather than solely focusing upon material propensities, Breward (2003) calls for the need to understand fashion as idea, image and object, and as created through processes of individual authorship, technological advancements, production and cultural dissemination.

There are two examples of engagements with specific material forms in the West which are worth consideration here. Firstly, although an account of an individual item of clothing – custom made robes – in an elite event for upper class debutantes in San Antonio, Thurgood Haynes' account (1998) points to the coagency of the clothing in articulating cultural categories of elitism. Through an in depth analysis of the robes, Thurgood Haynes shows how physically and contextually these categories are materialised, with the jewels and beading on the robes literally dazzling viewers of the event. The author argues that the robes make certain social categories visible as markers of difference, yet as these can't be overtly articulated, these categories are not verbalised but are made material through the robes. Another such example (Summers, 2001) traces

the material history of the corset as an integral aspect of how Victorian women were constructed as subjects and as women. Summers examines the physical mechanics that sustained and constructed Victorian ideals of womanhood, submissive, passive virginal reticence, by slimming women's waists and making women physically weak. She also demonstrates how the corset not only induced this apparent passivity but also simultaneously made breasts heave, faces flush, as women were simultaneously sexualised. What these two accounts show is that understandings of materiality are central in understanding the non-verbalisable, and, furthermore, that clothing in itself may constitute identities.

Both show the importance of understandings of how gender is constituted materially; yet both such examples are of individual items of clothing and focus on either a historical progression (Summers, 2001) or an elite, exclusive event (Thurgood-Haynes, 1998). Currently emerging is anthropological work, looking at contemporary clothing practices, wherein the material properties of different forms of cloth and clothing carry particular, differential effects (Kuechler and Miller, 2005). In particular, work on the efficacy of surfaces in the Pacific is instrumental in illuminating processes through which the fibrous material of cloth may be transformatory and efficacious (Kuechler and Were 2004, Colchester, 2003). Whilst recent focuses upon materiality are crucial, it is important to retain within this the focus upon the experiential and sensual aspects of clothing. Clothing is fundamental in both constituting appearance and the 'sensual experience of wearing' (Barnes and Eicher, 1992: 3). Such a focus is evident in Banerjee and Miller's account of the sari (2003), not as a static category of clothing, but as a lived, contested, sensual item

of clothing. This account attests to the possibilities within fusing the experiential, tactile facets of clothing, with understandings of the material propensities of clothing. My research project draws from current developments which fuse attention to material detail with an experiential focus upon the acts of dressing. Whilst such anthropological and material culture accounts are useful, there is an absence of such research on contemporary clothing in Britain.

Situating the wardrobe: fashion and the wider context:

This thesis aims to bring both the situated and contextualized approach of anthropology and an understanding of clothing as material culture to women's wardrobes in London and Nottingham. As such, it is necessary first to consider the ways in which fashion and clothing in a Western context have been theorized. A key emphasis within the sociological literature on clothing is the focus upon understanding 'fashion' as a system. Until the mid-20th century writings on fashion and clothing (such as Veblen, 1899 and Simmel, 1971), were based upon an attempt to account for the persistence of the fashion system. Although positing different models, both writers were attempting to explain the means through which the Western fashion system perpetuated itself. Veblen points to the underlying motivational structure for participation in fashion being that of emulation, yet for Simmel it involves the perpetual oscillation between individuality and conformity³. Both suggest a top-down model of the fashion system; the pernicious aspect of such approaches is the assumption both of the superficiality of clothing, and indeed the ways in which the explicitly gendered involvement positions women as passive.

³ Simmel's position is one which offers more scope for ambivalence and ambiguity and will be considered later. However Simmel is considered at this point to suggest the problematics and assumptions entailed within systemic abstract analyses.

Even though such an assumption of the homogeneity of the fashion system is largely questioned now, this systemic attempt to understand fashion still persists, albeit in a more nuanced form. A particularly significant and influential example of this is Barthes' seminal account (1985) which analyses the fashion system as an overarching system of signification, from which individual items derive their meaning. Barthes sees magazines as constitutive of fashion: there are no 'real' clothes which precede the discourse of fashion. The language of the magazines creates images and meanings which 'veil' (1985: xi) the object: here fashion is the reality of the image, as constructed in the magazines. Barthes' account, which accords primacy to the visual and the images of fashion, has been immensely influential in exciting subsequent empirical studies. Whilst his attempt was to understand the entire system of fashion, as a language and grammar, his legacy has been largely empirical. In the wake of Barthes, the proliferation of accounts is dominated by a paradigm of semiotic decoding, seen in the many textual analyses of magazines which abound within the literature (Winship, 1987, Evans and Thornton, 1989)⁴.

The plethora of fashion magazines, and the spectacular nature of fashion shows, attests to the importance of understanding the image within fashion. However, far more problematic is when items of clothing are theorized within cultural studies as a form of

⁴ The number of them is so immense it is impossible to cite them all; focusing upon, for example, the image and spectacle of fashion shows (Evans, 2000), or upon the fashion text (Buckley and Gundle, 2000). Chapters in the collected volume *Appearance and Power* (ed Johnson and Lennon, 1999), incorporate textual analyses (such as Lennon on *Star Trek*, 1999), many of which are informative, such as Ogle and Damhorst, 1999, which looks at how clothes are central to advancement, and management of social roles.

communication (Lurie, 1981), where fashion is seen as a language, with clothing being the 'words' used to describe yourself. Reducing clothing to its visual properties ignores the crucial tactile and sensual aspects of clothing, as worn by people. This research project aims to interrogate the specific materialities of clothing as worn on the body, investigating the complexity and layers within clothing. Given the focus of cultural studies upon popular culture and the everyday, the critique of the emphasis in costume history on the creative genius of the designer (Breward, 2000), is hardly surprising. However, rejecting the emphasis upon the individual object within costume history is tantamount to throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as the clothes as material objects come to be discarded in favour of textual analyses. As clothing is worn on the body, the materiality of clothing can only be understood as an embodied practice (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001, Entwistle, 2000, 2001). Entwistle refers to dress as 'situated bodily practice' (2000:4), as part of Maussian techniques of the body, dress being the outcome of dressing and wearing. Moving beyond textual analyses of fashion, clothes are seen phenomenologically, wherein the body is the existential ground of culture. Within this Entwistle proposes that dress is the means through which identity and the body articulate. This thesis focuses upon how it is that bodies manage to get dressed at all. In the act of dressing, considerations of the clothing on the body are primary, as women try on various outfits and consider their reflected images.

The dressed body is the finished point of dressing; the starting point being the wardrobe. As such, the wardrobe is the context for dressing. When dressing, women are dressing for social contexts; the wardrobe needs to be understood in terms of such social expectations

and the ordering of lives. Anthropological accounts of clothing show the ways in which clothing articulates social and cultural values, and changing historical contexts, make clothing inseparable from the context in which it arises. However, textual accounts of Western fashion are characterized by their self-referentiality: in Barthes account (1985) images of clothing are understood as they relate to each other, and clothing is situated only in the context of the fashion system. Structuralist approaches still have much to offer a study of getting dressed from the wardrobe. Given that dressing involves the assemblage of outfits, it is necessary to understand women's perceptions of 'what goes'. Clothing cannot be comprehensively understood if based upon individual items of clothing (such as Brydon, 1998), and as such Barthes is useful in understanding the wardrobe as a structural totality, as discussed earlier. This research raises the question of whether the wardrobe constitutes a personal aesthetic through women's sense of sartorial normativity, and how this articulates with externally defined fashions and social expectations.

- In considering these questions, the wardrobe needs to be situated in the wider fashion context. Veblen and Simmel's writings theorise 'the fashion system' as if there was a homogeneous overarching system. Current emphasis now falls upon the fragmented nature of the fashion system, and the multiple domains within it (White et al 2000), and on attributing greater agency to the consumer in constructing their own identities and meanings. One of the problematics of analyses which take the abstract workings of the system as their basis, is that in this particular model, women who participate merely become the unreflexive cogs in the machinery of the fashion system. With the rise of

cultural studies, and emphases on the construction and contestation of meaning, such top-down homogeneous models have come under question; in their studies of sub-cultural style, writers such as McRobbie (1994) and Hebdige (1987) suggest that creativity and innovation comes as much from street style as from design houses; individual participations cannot merely be read off from systemic analyses. Such positions arose not only to challenge inadequate theorising, but are also a product of a changing fashion climate; with haute couture no longer seen as the sole source of inspiration. The multiple domains for the production of knowledge about fashion – magazines, television, fashion designers, celebrities (Entwistle, 2000) - allied with the ubiquity of fashion within all arenas of contemporary life, place the onus on individuals to be sartorially aware, yet simultaneously the basis for making these claims is shifting and insecure.

In such a context a shift away from broad based analyses of the overarching system to the level of an internal dilemma of the individual is pertinent. An issue raised by Simmel (1971) in discussing fashion as involving the essential tension between individuality and conformity acquires particular resonance. Although he explicated this as the underpinning for the entire fashion system, Wilson (1985) translates this issue from the abstract workings of a system to an internal dilemma and ambivalence for the individual. The ambiguity lies in the opportunity fashion presents to the individual to be linked to a social group yet simultaneously offering a means of expressing individuality. The self is offered yet is simultaneously undermined. This raises the questions for this research of how women can construct their identities in the context of such an expectation of individuality, and indeed how the self may be simultaneously conformist and personal

and creative. Such an ambiguity can be seen to take place internally, leading analyses of fashion to be constructed around anxiety (Clarke and Miller, 2002) in the context of such uncertainty. Anxiety is, in part, a product of perceived fashion normativity, wherein ability to participate is dependent upon the adequate knowledge.

I am focusing on clothing specifically rather than fashionable clothing necessarily, because concern over what is fashionable is only one arena of uncertainty that I will be investigating. For the purposes of this research project I will understand fashion in terms of particular situated knowledges regarding sartorial expectations, which may or may not emerge as a particular stance to clothing throughout my research. Importantly the distinction between clothing and fashion may become important, with the primary characteristic of the fashionable being the temporal dimension, what items are 'in' now. Participation in fashion is predicated upon requisite knowledges. These anxieties and knowledges are complex and multi-layered, as dressing also involves fundamental cultural competences (Entwistle 2001, Craik, 1993, Goffman, 1971a and Mauss, 1973). The process of dressing is based upon the ability to assemble items of clothing to create an outfit. It also involves the expectation that women will dress appropriately at home, taking children to school, in the work place. Therefore the wardrobe cannot solely be understood in terms of the context of 'fashion'.

Given the multiple roles women are called upon to occupy, and such evidences of ambiguities and anxiety, an account which looks at the ways in which women manage to construct the diverse possibilities of the self would be particularly fruitful. Within the

literature on fashion there is currently an abundance of treatises of sub-cultural style within the cultural studies literature, following on from Hebdige. By focusing upon a particular sub-group, aspects which denote membership to others are the focus of analysis. Such accounts flourish in the literature: Cole (2000) chapters in Johnson and Lennon (1999) Keenan (2001) and Brydon and Neisson (1998). All look at one particular group of people or particular primary social identity through clothing, around which other identities are expected to cohere. For example, Keenan (2001) looks at different identities through clothes, such as the Muslim schoolgirl or a ballerina, assuming a particular identity as primary and foundational around which coheres a socially shared identity. Whilst such accounts clearly have validity, in this research project the aims are to look at the diversity of identities women are, formerly were, or aspire to being, and how these are actualised in the moment of assemblage in front of the wardrobe. When looking at the outfits that emerge from the wardrobe, and the ways in which combinations are made, this may in turn impact back upon understandings of fashion. Rather than just see 'fashion' as the context for this research, it may also be a creativity that emerges from the wardrobe. Writing on the wearing of second hand and retro clothing, Gregson et al (2001) document the playfulness often involved in wearing such clothing, and the empowering 'knowingness' (2001:12) that wearing and recombination enable. As such, based upon particular knowledges or stances, the wardrobe may be the site for innovation.

Towards an ethnography of getting dressed:

As I am concerned with clothing, and not necessarily fashionable clothing, fashion is understood here as a practice, through innovations which may emerge from the wardrobe. Given that 'fashion' is now theorized as fragmented, and not as a homogeneous system, an understanding of fashion through the micro-site of the wardrobe is particularly pertinent. As such, I will draw from current emphases on the various practices that constitute fashion; within cultural studies there is an emphasis on fashion as it evolves from street-style (McRobbie. 1994), this research project moves this understanding of the generation of looks, to the wardrobe. The fragmentation of the fashion industry is mirrored in the diversity of contemporary accounts, which cover a range of fashion practices, and sites for the generation of fashion images and knowledges. However, the act of getting dressed is carried out at least once a day, by all women, and is central to daily rituals; yet this centrality and ubiquity at the level of practice, does not translate into academic attention. Within the diverse disciplinary accounts the act of dressing remains relatively unexamined. The only attempt to understand women's daily quandary in front of the wardrobe in a British context (Banim et al, 2001) offers little understanding of the role of clothing in the construction of the gendered self: '...we don't want to hide in concealing bland clothes, we want to strut in our revealing tighter, brighter clothes. We want to show off' (2001:3). This approach contributes to the assumptions of fashion as superficial and ephemeral and serves to undermine the topic of fashion as an academically viable topic.

This research project involves an interrogation of the construction of the self through the material act of getting dressed, and as such the 'pathological approach' (Beward, 2003:

64) of costume history is useful, with its emphasis on understanding the artefactual nature of clothing through the intricate details of construction. Yet the items of clothing to be looked at here, do not exist in museums, but rather need to be understood as lived garments, even when they are at rest in the wardrobe. The literature on the wearing of clothing is useful in animating the understanding of clothing in the wardrobe. Anthropological accounts of clothing seem initially promising in situating clothing as material objects in wider societal and cultural contexts. However, such accounts often focus upon communities, particular social groupings, or indeed upon individual items of clothing and their cultural significance; such research seems to assume a priori the cultural value and significance of clothing as a culturally significant feature of social life in non-Western communities. Often the opposite appears to be true of accounts of Western fashion, focusing upon textuality, or writing in abstracted terms.

My research draws from more recent trends which point to the experiences of wearing clothing, and accounts which attempt to explicate clothing as it rests in the wardrobe. I will bring to this many of the possibilities raised by cross-cultural understandings of clothing, attempting to understand clothing as it may externalize memories and histories of the wearer, and the ways in which connectivities between people may become part of the clothing. Whilst these anthropological concerns are essential in arriving at a comprehensive understanding of clothing as a material artifact, this needs to be situated in the contemporary fashion 'system'. The ambivalences and uncertainties which characterise the contemporary fashion climate, and indeed wider expectations pertaining to appearance, are played out in microcosm in women's daily dilemma in front of the

wardrobe, seen in how women select from a wardrobe of possible items, and make connections and combinations. As such, an understanding of the processes of selection in front of the wardrobe is extremely appropriate in understanding these uncertainties, and indeed the possible generations of innovation.

The context of this research is not only a 'fashion' and clothing one. As I am interested in understand how women may construct themselves through clothing, it is also necessary to understand the expectations of the 'self' and 'individual' in a Western context. Although the pervasive Western discourse of the self assumes an immaterial intangible self, through examining a particular instance of externalisation I will be looking at how the self may be constituted through material practices in the context of such a discourse, and the 'burden of the self'. This burden is exacerbated when seen in the context of sartorial expectations, where individuals are expected to not only have a coherent self, but moreover to be able to express it. In order to explore alternative possibilities of self-construction, other than that of verbal linear coherence and as immaterial, cross-cultural perspectives are useful. Whilst the contexts in which such work has taken place are extremely different, such as Mount Hagen in Papua New Guinea (Strathern1979) or Bali (Napier, 1985), they offer possibilities for seeing the self as constructed at the 'surface', and as multiple, and indeed not as a unitary single entity. The self that I am looking at is constituted through a particular material practice; therefore I am not attempting to come up with a theory of 'the self' in its totality, but as it emerges through the practice of dressing. This 'self' is not predetermined, but is seen as processual, as created through the interaction between women and items of clothing.

The concerns that emerge from looking at the act of dressing refract back on many wider anthropological concerns, such as how an alternative trajectory of the self may be posited when seen through material practices. Similarly considered is how memory, biography and relationships may be negotiated through clothing, rather than just through verbal narratives. The relationship between 'the individual' and 'the social' is a central one in anthropology and the social sciences more widely; this is given a particular slant when considered through getting dressed. Through focusing upon this specific practice and process, neither the social nor the individual are prioritised, nor assumed to exist a priori, but rather constitute each other. Even through dressing often occurs alone, it involves imagined projections to the social situations. Dressing is a unique enactment, yet each outfit is to be seen in public, and as such incorporates sartorial normativity. As such, dressing involves the interrelationship between normativity and creativity, social expectations and individuality. Whilst dressing incorporates these concerns, it occurs mostly alone, and, therefore, a particular challenge of this thesis is how to acquire access to it, which forms the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Methodology and the material culture of wardrobes:

The act of getting dressed occurs within the private domain of the bedroom, mostly alone, unless in the presence of family members or friends. As such it poses the methodological issue of how to be present at a moment at which strangers are not present, let alone academic researchers. I managed to acquire such access through the familiarity acquired through the depth of involvement offered by ethnography, the intense and long-term involvement in women's lives. As is evidenced by many anthropological accounts of clothing, such accounts are not only in-depth, but are also importantly holistic and contextualised. Clothing is understood in wider social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the broad orientation of my study is ethnographic; although it is not a traditional ethnography in the sense of going to 'the field' or working with a community, nor based in a specific territorialised location. In part this is a product of context; notions of traditional ethnography arose through research carried out in societies where most political, economic and social activities were carried out in public, in a community (for example, Evans-Pritchard 1940, Malinowski 1922). The task of the ethnographer in these situations was to situate themselves in that one place, and observe all activities that occur, to be written up in an anthropological monograph.

The nature of contemporary British society is such that unless research is taking place in an institutional setting, often such a study of a spatially located group is not possible (Hockey, 2002). Nor is it representative of what happens in urban sites in Britain; aside from much paid work, many activities take place behind closed doors, within the home.

As such, people are predominantly not connected in localised communities. Even the outside world as appropriated through the internet and the television happens within the home (Miller, 2001). As traditional ethnography is neither possible nor suitable, the anthropological holism here derives from the holism of the wardrobe, women's life trajectories, and the context of their lives. True to the anthropological tradition of ethnography (Oakley, 1976) I will seek to elicit whole cultural worlds - although my foregrounded issue and primary interest is that of clothing, I will seek to understand this as situated in other aspects of their lives, and thus hope to understand multiple issues and identities that are articulated through clothing. By understanding it as part of women's biographical trajectory and other material objects in their life I will hope to arrive at a more comprehensive and contextualised understanding of the material culture of clothing.

Invariably this moment of getting dressed happens standing in front of the wardrobe, and as such this will form one of the bases for my research. Whilst anthropological accounts are instrumental in pointing to the need for an in-depth approach, they have tended to focus upon clothing in a particular community, or as linked to tradition, and as such the clothing comes to appear bounded. Similarly, this notion of clothing as cohesive around particular identities and communities is evident in accounts of sub-cultural style (Cole, 2000). There are however notable exceptions to this, and in particular more recently, there has been a shift away from empirical accounts of unified social groupings through clothing. Anthropological (Hansen, 2000) and geographical (Gregson and Crewe, 2003) accounts have converged in questioning the fixed values within clothing, and look more at the movement of clothing through markets (Hansen, 2000) and second hand shops

(Gregson and Crewe, 2003). When applied to the wardrobe, this enables understandings of clothing not just as stored and static, but as a fulcrum for general domestic processes of tidying, and sorting (Gregson and Beale, 2004). The wardrobe is thus a locus of certain practices, and is grounded and rooted in the context of domestic arrangements and relationships. Furthermore, understandings of the movements and practices surrounding clothing, which imbue differential values, make evident that as clothing shifts between domains, so too meanings are in flux. This move away from fixity of meaning and cohesion is evident in Clarke and Miller's work (2002). Here, fashion as ambivalence and a source of anxiety is empirically accessible through individuals, as this becomes an interiorised concern for the individual. Such notions of ambivalence become amenable to analysis through looking at the whole array of clothing women own and, therefore, the multiplicity of overlapping identities or roles that women aspire to, have formerly been or enact in their daily lives and how these are negotiated in the moment of dressing.

The wardrobe entails particular practices, yet is also a collection of items of clothing which exist as material objects; where facets such as colour, pattern, style, texture all become crucial in the assemblage of items. Whilst the absence of 'the wearer' within textual accounts has been firmly critiqued by focuses upon practices of wearing, this thesis also aims to challenge the focus upon 'the image' through investigating the materiality of clothing. Running alongside academic developments in anthropology, sociology, and geography are the primarily descriptive cataloguing methods of costume history which uses an almost 'pathological' approach (Breward, 2003: 64), intricately documenting the material details of cut and construction, searching for evidence of wear

and tear. Costume history focuses attention upon collections in museums, yet the methods have clear resonance for studies of contemporary fashion, and form an important redress to the lack of engagement with the material form in other academic accounts. The expertise of objects within costume history comes from museum curators, who often only have the material artefacts upon which to base their conclusions. However, in analyses of contemporary clothing, when we have access to images and verbal accounts, it is as if such material understandings are no longer necessary and the clothing ceases to exist as a material object. The particular methodological orientations for this project emerge from an awareness of the need to reconcile this understanding of the materiality of clothing, with the focus upon practices of wearing, within wider relational and social contexts.

The methodological orientation is ethnographic, yet within this I will be incorporating a variety of methods (detailed later): interviews, observation of how women select clothes from the wardrobe and how they are worn, documentation of the contents of the wardrobe, photographs of clothing, clothes diaries and an understanding of the particular material form of clothing and how this impacts upon constructions of selfhood. The inadequacy of verbal accounts alone is a founding principle of material culture studies (Miller, 1998) yet this acquires particular pertinence in this context. As I have already suggested, the clothes themselves are agentic in processes of identity formation, thus an understanding of the particular material form lends itself to a more comprehensive understanding of clothing. Understandings of this involve looking at the functionality of items of clothing, fabrics, style, length, shape and where items are positioned in the wardrobe. Furthermore, in understanding the physical condition of the clothing, therein

looking for clues and material traces of usage (Ginzburg, 1988), such as the heel of the shoe that has snapped off or the pristine unworn dress, a more enriched account may ensue. Secondly, what may be accessed through the clothes themselves is something which is naturalised and the underlying reasons for action are no longer verbalised as they appear so obvious: 'history turned into nature' (Bourdieu, 1977:78). This is particularly important in terms of the orders of the wardrobe; means of categorisation ensue from particular biographical trajectories and are no longer consciously articulated. I aim to elicit not only the non-verbalisable but also conscious and unconscious structures of categorisation.

Ethnographic sites:

The fieldwork was carried out in 2 urban sites in Britain: London and Nottingham over a period of 15 months. This is not an ethnography of 'place', nor of a particular territorially situated community. The micro-site of the research is the wardrobe, in an attempt to understand how 'deep' relationships, biographical elements, aspects of the self may be constituted through clothing, and in the act of assemblage. I acknowledge that this occurs in the wider spatial relations of the city; however this research starts with the relations and practices that emerge from the wardrobe. Given the aim of understanding deeper relationships to clothing, through contextualisation in lives, and through materiality, it seemed appropriate to select a site that is particularly enmeshed in such discourses of superficiality, in order to challenge this association. This trivialisation of fashion and clothes is most marked in advanced post-industrial capitalist societies; as an exemplar of such a site, I chose to carry out my fieldwork in Britain. The first fieldwork site selected

was London, given the immense diversity and cosmopolitanism (Hall, 2000) of inhabitants, of relationships, living arrangements in London, diversity is enabled within my informants. Furthermore as many of my informants were selected through personal contacts, for pragmatic reasons it seemed an ideal location, given how important access is in this particular project.

Initially the sole location for this research was in London, as I carried out the research I started to wonder whether the specificities of London as a global fashion city (Breward, Conekin, Cox, 2002) might skew my results, making any findings a mere quirk of the London context. Through a personal contact, I was given the opportunity to extend my sample to look at women's wardrobes in Nottingham and carried out 5 months fieldwork there. Even though I was not carrying out an ethnography 'of' London, if fieldwork was only carried out here, it becomes impossible to establish that this thesis is about the specific relationship between women and their clothing, and not about a relationship that is particular to London. In fact only by looking at another urban site in Britain, and establishing continuities in the issues that emerge, was I able to confirm that this is not a relationship distinctive to a unique location. Prior to fieldwork I was already aware of many of the continuities between the two sites: the existence of a high street of core chain stores in every city/town in Britain, access to the same media resources on fashion (magazines, television programmes). Both locations are therefore part of the same production of fashion knowledges and sartorial normativity. This is not to negate the unique characteristics of each site, such as the existence of more independent boutiques and designer flag-ship stores in London.

The use of women in Nottingham enabled me to extend my understanding, through in depth case studies, of the specificities of how clothing externalises relationships and biography. By utilising the two locations, I was able to confirm that the emergent data from my first set of fieldwork was not qualitatively distinct from that in Nottingham. Whilst there are differences of location and context, these were not the salient divisions between women I talked to, nor was territoriality an important order of the wardrobe. As such, this is not a comparative ethnography between two cities, as the focus is not upon a geographical location. Indeed, as the networks of women I looked at developed organically, the women in either location were not comparable in terms of numbers, age range, class or ethnicities. Rather the emphasis that emerges is upon continuities. Through using a second location I was able to build upon the possibilities of my first fieldwork. Contact in Nottingham was through a former high street fashion designer, and the women I accessed were all former fashion, or fine art, MA students. As the fieldwork was not aiming to be comparative, having such a different group offered extremely interesting results. The main networks in my London sample were family relations, or close-knit friendship groups. However, the Nottingham women are conjoined by shared knowledges and educational position about fashion. Given that involvement in fashion depends upon the requisite knowledge of both what is fashionable and how items should be worn together, looking at such a group offered the possibility to consider the impacts such knowledges might have. Through my second ethnography I was able to build upon the ideas about fashion, innovation and knowledge that emerged from my London fieldwork.

Selecting informants: networks

In delineating my pool of informants, one my primary concerns was being able to investigate women's wardrobes in depth, and thus finding women who would be willing to spend significant amounts of time with me. Given the intimate nature of my enquiries, taking place initially within the bedroom, the issue of access was particularly pertinent. I carried out a 3 month pilot project prior to carrying out my final fieldwork in order to establish how to gain access to these women, and indeed, how much time was necessary in order to attain information relevant to getting dressed. As I had no predefined parameters of identity within my informants other than that they were women, I tried various sites: high street shops, mother and baby groups, women's exercise classes, community centres, doctor's surgeries and launderettes. However, all proved problematic in that women were reluctant to allow a stranger into their wardrobe. Methods that have proved successful for other researchers in gaining access to the home (such as an ethnography of a street by Miller, 1998) were not open to me as I was a woman researching alone. This issue was resolved by using my own diverse social networks within London and Nottingham to access women through personal contacts. Once one woman was secured for fieldwork, she often in turn acted as a gatekeeper introducing me to her close female acquaintances. Such a process of snowball sampling enable the participation of willing informants (women being more likely to participate if someone they know has already done so and enjoyed it).

Moreover, it also resolves one of the epistemological concerns central to my thesis. Notions of superficiality position women shoppers as driven by individualistic, selfish

concerns; I aimed instead to understand women not as isolated individuals, but as relational and participating in fashion as grounded individuals. I decided to study women primarily through networks (family or friendship groups). By understanding women as relational, notions of a bounded self may be challenged as women are understood as constituted through their friendships and familial relationships (Stanley, 1992). A second advantage of understanding women within families in particular is that a range of generations could be investigated, along with an investigation into the way in which clothes' use may alter with changes in an individual's biography. Furthermore, looking at connections through social networks is useful in a context such as London or Nottingham, as heterogeneous, diverse, and spatially fragmented territories. Understanding women's clothing through networks is perhaps far more appropriate in this context, and a means of assessing how people are connected in a diverse and potentially divisive conurbation such as London. As such the practice of fieldwork becomes at times disconnected as there is no one 'place' to base fieldwork, which connects all the disparate parts – rather a series of wardrobes and women who are not connected spatially. Such disconnected, at times fragmented, fieldwork should not be seen as a poor relation to ethnography of territorially based social locations; fieldwork is in fact a product of and arises out of social relations within a city such as London.

Another factor which arose out of my pilot study was how long I needed to spend with women. Even when women were accessed through personal contacts, and I was able to start research in the wardrobe, I soon realised how intimate one needs to be in order to be present at, or even be told about, the personal anguishes of dressing. As such, it was

essential to work with a smaller number of women yet spending a great deal of time to arrive at this point of intimacy. In Wallman's pioneering (1984) study of London households, her research is based upon the empirical study of 8 homes – in order to delineate various household practices, rather than forming a representative picture of British society. Similarly, I am not aiming to arrive at a comprehensive or representative picture of women's relationship to clothing, but rather to look at the specific process of dressing, and interrogate how the self may be constructed thus, through different social networks.

As a consequence of needing to arrive at the point wherein women were comfortable talking about their dressing concerns, I ended up excavating 27 wardrobes in total. Although as my ethnography involved talking to other people in women's lives, usually friends or partners or family members, the number of people talked to and interviewed is greater. Such a number was not pre-planned, but rather emerged as the networks terminated. Of these, 15 were based in London, and 12 in Nottingham. Not all of the women accessed were connected with each other as in some instances I carried out an initial wardrobe interview with someone, and whilst they themselves were keen to participate, for various reasons I never acquired further contacts through them. However, this is not to see such examples as less informative. Even these instances still existed in relationships to others (Wallman, 1984) and in most instances I talked to many significant others in their lives in order to ascertain the kind of perceptions and expectations these people have and how this impacts upon what women chose to wear. The participation between myself and the informant was not any less inclusive or rigorous. In the

Nottingham samples, only one instance was not connected (Faye); there were 2 other networks one of 5 women and the other of 6. Both groups were connected through being either former fashion students (Alice, Emanuela, Helen, Louise, Anna, Gemma), and the other as having done a similar creative MA (Akane, Nom, Rosanna, Clare, Lydia). Acquired thus, the commonalities, and unities here are based upon shared knowledges and potential fashion and aesthetic orientations.

In the London sample 6 of the wardrobes were of unconnected women (Sadie, Marie, Sarah, Joanna, Margaret, Sonya), and the others were involved within 2 networks. The two networks are represented below: in each instance the heavy black line indicates union through marriage, the thin black line indicates familial relationships with the more senior generations high up, and the dashed lines represent friendships. Names that are in capital letters and underlined are women I interviewed. Figure one shows a small network of interviewees: 2 sisters, and their sister-in-law; all three, however, I got to know extremely well, and the network was particularly important in explicating familial relationships as I managed to talk to their husbands, mother, daughters and mother-in-law. The other London network represented in figure 2, involved 6 women: incorporating both mother-daughter and friends. The inter-crossing dashed lines indicates a joint friendship group; a group that proved particularly useful as these women all lived together, and for them getting dressed to go out is a common activity. Within this single network the differential bonds between contemporaries, and across generations becomes apparent.

Figure 1 – London network 1.

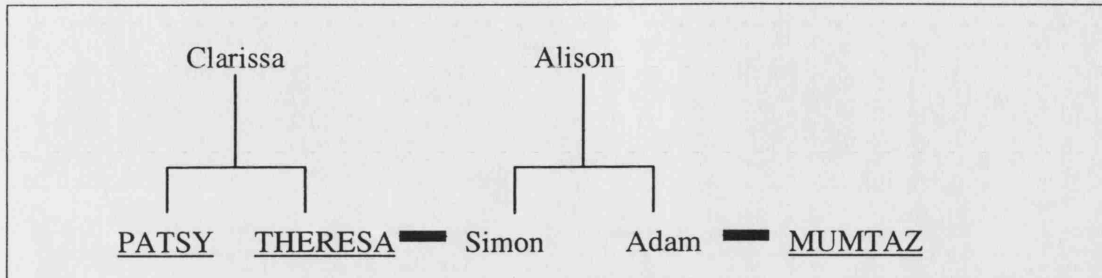
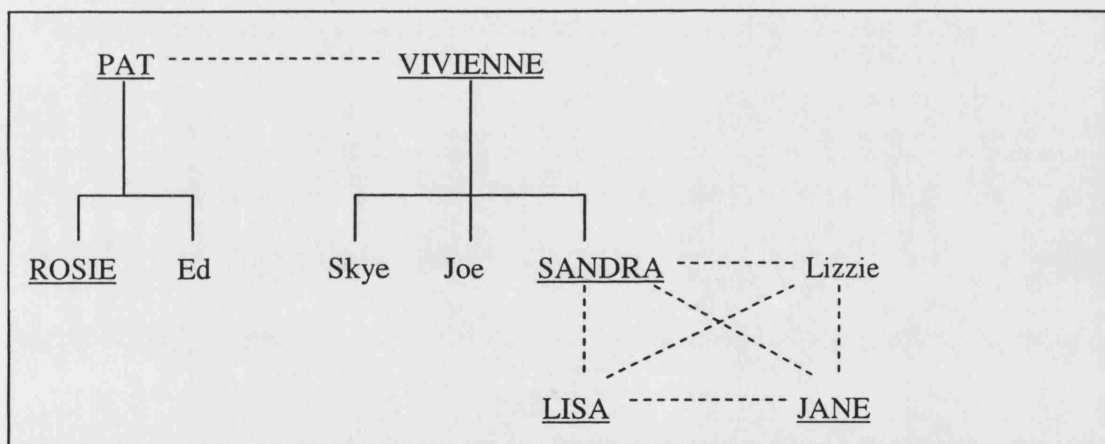


Figure 2 – London network 2.



The types of networks are extremely different, and as such are non-comparable, but rather show how particular relationships are embedded in, and negotiated through, the practices surrounding clothing. The different networks are unique examples of particular kinds of relationships and how clothing may constitute this. Network One example is a small close-knit family; network 2 incorporates both family, life-long friendship of older women, and a group of close knit contemporaries. For the Nottingham networks, there

are some close friendships within the groups, but the primary characteristic is their shared interests and aesthetic orientations and knowledges that emerge from their educational background.

The overall constitution of my field-work group is characterised by diversity. The ages range from late teens to women in their mid-sixties; divergences appear across the group in terms of: interests in clothing, ethnicities, economic backgrounds and employment status. This is not to say I have covered all aspects of diversity, just those which emerged from the organically created networks. Rather than list all of the variables here, I have included a bio-pic of each woman in Appendix 1. Whilst I did not predetermine what aspects of identity or lifestyle were important in understanding wardrobes a variety of facets emerged as particularly crucial from my fieldwork: working status, financial resources, living status (alone or with family or friends), relationship status, ethnicity (this was only important in some instances) and sometimes where the person is from (particularly important in those who only moved to the UK when adults). In Appendix 1, I have included a summary of all this information for each person; in line with seeing the individual women I interviewed as similarly relational, I have also outlined their personal networks (how many brothers and sisters each person has, if they live with their partner). The facets which are outlined emerge as important dependent upon the situation and the items of clothing, and will be discussed through case studies, yet form a useful background understanding of the composition of my informants.

Ethnographic specifics:

Underpinning and guiding the overall ethnographic process is the dynamic between researcher and informant; as ethnography is an interactional process wherein information and knowledge is produced through a series of negotiated relationships, an awareness of the position of the researcher is crucial (Silverman, 1997). In fact, the fundamental challenge levelled at naturalist ethnography (such as Duneier, 1992) is the failure to recognise that an ethnographer is not merely recording reality, but is in fact involved in its creation (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). The relations between representation and 'reality' are elided, as they are seen as part of the same process (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). Broadly speaking, the central facets to be aware of in my research are that I am carrying out research in London (where I live already), and that I am looking at women (and am myself a woman). I am not assuming that there is a single category 'woman', nor that there is a homogeneous entity 'British society', more a set of shifting positionalities and contexts. As I am on some levels an 'insider' anthropologist, working in my own country this clearly impacts upon my research and the implicit cultural understandings I possess (Rapport, 2002). Given the heterogeneity of cultural forms and arrangements, my position as an 'insider' is contingent upon each encounter with any particular informant. Furthermore, in pointing to the significance of gender I am not trying to state that as such I assume there is a commonality amongst all women which will override all other differences. Rather I understand that different facets emerge as important at different moments in the encounters.

For example, sometimes ethnicity comes to the fore; as one woman I encountered, a Ugandan Asian who also formerly lived in India, has an entire wardrobe of Indian clothing: saris, shalwar kamiz and several Rajasthani outfits. In this instance, there were no shared cultural knowledges here between informant and researcher; rather I was learning afresh. These women are also positioned in terms of ethnicity, occupation, nationality, religion and familial relationships. Shared expectations and cultural knowledges are contingent. The post-modern critiques levelled at naturalism focus upon the negative influence of the researcher. However, the presence of the researcher can also be utilised in a positive way in doing research. Knowledge is acquired in everyday life through interaction between positioned individuals (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Therefore shared knowledges are also something that can be utilised in order to elicit information, and to build a relationship (Stanley, 1993). This is particularly important given the intimate nature of my enquiries. For example, many women, whilst willing to show me their hanging clothing, were far more reticent when it came to discussing underwear. My tactic was to share some anecdote of my own, which more often than not serves to acquire information in return, and establishes an intimacy.

What this example also highlights is that the progression of intimacy and the development of relationships in ethnography cannot be assumed. As ethnography develops organically, many of the stages of research I had planned, or relationships I had expected to progress turn out in the opposite manner to that which I had intended (a facet of research that is well-documented, for example in Stanley, 1993). Given the intimate nature of this research, this issue is particularly important. I encountered not only the

problems of accessing the private domain of the home (Miller, 2001), yet was also starting in the most intimate space within this: the bedroom. This becomes even more intimate as it involves women engaging with their own bodies, and often fundamental insecurities. Rather than following the ethnographic progression from outside: in, I was starting in this domain of intimacy. I found such a process worked extremely well as it usually enabled an instant rapport. I got to know my informants from the clothing outwards. However, given that such relationships develop organically through interaction, in some instances I never moved beyond a few separate interviews (Rapport, 2002, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Even carrying out a couple of interviews with accompanying photographs, was extremely useful; such interviews are still embedded in experience (Kvale, 1996) and ensured access to both the home, and within that the bedroom. The understandings acquired were based upon the ways in which each relationship developed, and a variety of specific methods were utilised.

Ethics:

Once access had been established, I either had an initial meeting with a particular woman to acquaint myself with her and brief her on my research, or for some women this happened briefly on the same occasion of starting fieldwork. The particular ethical issues pertinent to my research arise from the intimate nature of my enquiries, and the fact that as my research was carried out in the country in which I live, anonymity had to be guaranteed. As part of the briefing I informed all the women the purposes of my research, the fact that the data would be used in my PhD thesis. I also obtained permission to record any interviews and to take photographs. Women were also told that at any point

we could terminate the interview, and any data they wished to be absent from my findings could be omitted. I have also changed the names of all informants, and altered any details which might reveal their identity, yet not altering the significance of what I have found.

The initial wardrobe interview:

This was the starting point of each encounter, and took place in front of the wardrobe(s). First, all of the spaces where women stored their clothing were documented. Then women were asked to go through all of the items in their wardrobe, giving an account of each. This also involved going through their shoes and accessories, many of which were kept in the wardrobe or in other locations. The interviews were semi-structured (Kvale, 1996), in that women were given initial direction by the interviewer, yet subsequently issues raised were developed by the interviewee, with my steering interceptions. The sorts of issues I encouraged them to tell me (either on this occasion or in later interviews) were:

- What the item is
- How long women have owned the item for
- Who bought it
- How often is it worn
- The most significant times it has been worn (thus eliciting particular memories)
- What occasions is it worn to
- What is it worn with
- How do women take care of it (i.e. cleaning procedures)

I audio-recorded each first interview, and also photographed the overall wardrobe and aimed to take photographs of each item of clothing. In line with my interest in materiality, the photographs enabled me to capture the aesthetics of each garment and, whilst I appreciate that tactile and sensual facets are absent from the photos, I was able to at least enhance my understanding of facets such as colour, pattern, style and length. Furthermore I was able to see the totality of all the items – how they relate to both the accounts women give of the items, and also how they relate to each other, to point to overall aesthetic orders of the wardrobe. Taking photos also enabled me to spend time reflecting on the items when not actually with the women, in order to reflect on what women had told me and to see what particular facet of an item makes it so important to a woman. However, photographs are not a direct representation of the items itself, nor are they a precise documentation of the visuals of an item of clothing (Pink, 2001). Yet having the photos meant it was possible to familiarise myself with their wardrobes in great depth.

This was important as women were not keen for me to spend time alone rummaging through their clothing. Rather, the photographs were used in conjunction with verbal narratives and other methods, as detailed below, as a contributory factor in understandings, and part of the ongoing dynamic process of ethnography. Women were willing to have their items photographed, but even though all women are familiar with photography, this particular encounter is an alien one. All women possessed many photos of themselves in their clothing, yet the photographing of items of clothing in themselves

is not often done. Women were more comfortable having photos taken of their more spectacular items, such as ball gowns, yet on some occasions women seemed reticent about having me photograph their collection of ordinary t-shirts. In such instance, I merely noted down what the items were, and if necessary went back to them on a later occasions. Often women were not keen to talk about the more mundane items as they worried I would find them 'boring' and rushed to show me the more exciting outfits. As a result the documentation of items is not always complete.

Later interviews:

Prior to seeing the women for a second time I always went over the audio-recordings and photographs, in order to develop a familiarity with the clothing. Furthermore, as I was aware that I could not be with the women all the time (nor would they want me to be) a particular moment that is important is when women decide what to wear in the morning. I found a useful means of accessing this information was to get women to do a clothes diary, detailing what they put on each day for a week, including where they were going and if they tried anything else on first. I asked women to do this before the second interview. Therefore on this occasion we went over what was written, in reference to the items in the wardrobe. Based upon my desire to understand clothing as assemblage, I asked about how items in the wardrobe are put together on various occasions. Often women tried them on for me.

Broader context:

I aimed to achieve as deep an involvement with the women as possible, in order to be present when women are choosing which outfits to wear and getting dressed. It is ideal to build up a relationship with the women beyond merely standing in front of and documenting their wardrobe. However, I found that given the personal details that arise from looking through women's clothes and underwear, and being in their bedrooms, a certain degree of intimacy almost inevitably ensues. The nature of my involvement and how I may make myself as helpful as possible depends on the specific person I am with: for example with mothers, assistance with the children or doing their shopping for them is often appreciated. What I did with the women, and how I managed to 'hang around' with them therefore depends on the specifics of the person, and remains flexible. In many cases I managed to situate myself in their lives, by talking to other people who they lived with, and getting involved in any activities within the home that I could. In some cases I reached such a degree of intimacy that I stayed overnight, and was able to be there when they dressed in the morning. I also did life-history interviews, in order to link the clothing into the broader trajectory of women's lives.

Final data:

The final data for each woman consists of:

- interview transcripts
- photographs of the items discussed, and of the wardrobes
- my own notes on the items and observations of what the women did.
- clothes diaries
- general field-notes.

Therefore I have a complete itemisation of what women wear in photographic, verbal, and written terms (the latter including: where the item was in the wardrobe and so on). All this data is important not only in the presentation of my final thesis, but also formed a fundamental part of the fieldwork. For example, I went through clothes diaries with women, and I read them in reference to the photographs. Similarly I often talked to women in reference to the wardrobe. Thus the photos, interviews, and notes all informed each other, and none were taken as definitive versions of their wardrobe. This is crucial given that the constitution of the wardrobe changes so much throughout the year.

Within the thesis I have incorporated quotes from the women, along with my own descriptions. I have also, where appropriate included photographs of the items. The visual is crucial in capturing aspects of materiality. However other aspects of sensuality and warmth I attempted to convey through my own writing. Given that I have such a complete documentation of women's wardrobes, and as this is the site from which the process of getting dressed occurs, the next section will consider as explication of the general material culture of wardrobes as it emerges from my fieldwork.

Wardrobe overview:

Standing in front of the wardrobe, deliberating over what to wear, is the beginning of the process of getting dressed and as such the empirical starting point, and underpinning for this research is the wardrobe. This section will consider it as a physical structure which entails specific spatial practices: how clothing is stored and organised within the wardrobe, how many clothes women possess, and how many are worn. As such, the wardrobe consists of both temporal and structural orderings which are overlapping; the ways in which clothing is organised, and cycles of active and inactive clothing, have key implications for how assemblages are made. Given the depth of involvement this methodology allows, much of the chapters that follow will be case study based. However here I will attempt to give a context to the individual case studies by delineating an overview of the material culture of wardrobes. The term wardrobe is used to apply both to the totality of clothing that women own, as well as the particular locations and receptacles within which clothing is stored. The majority of women possessed at least one conventional wardrobe – an example of which is shown below in photo 1:



Photo 1: Nom's wardrobe

The 'typical' wardrobe here consists of a wooden rectangular box structure with 2 doors, behind which there is a metal rail running horizontally along the top, enabling clothing to be hung on hangers. At the bottom is a slide out drawer which usually houses folded clothes. Some wardrobes also contain open shelves, running from the top of the wardrobe to the bottom, next to the clothing rail. This conventional wardrobe style was possessed by the majority of women, with 3 exceptions: 2 of which had alcoves built into the structure of their bedrooms, with a curtain shutting the clothing off, neither liking 'the feel' of a wooden box in their bedroom; the structure of the wardrobe clearly impacts

upon the spatial relations of the bedroom. The final exception was Rosanna, whose wardrobe is depicted below in photo 2: a walk-in wardrobe, with rails either side, enclosed by a purple drape curtain.

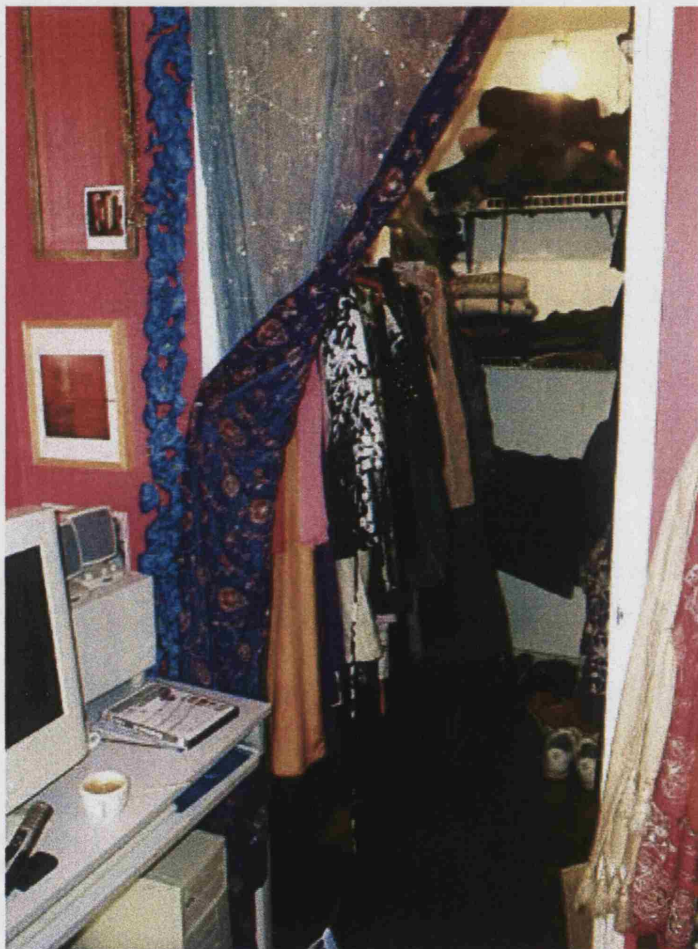


Photo 2: Rosanna's wardrobe

Not apparent from the photo, is that the rail evident on the left hand side, is also present on the right. The effect entailed by such a spatial organisation is that on perusing her clothing, she cannot just stand and look at the clothing, but rather has to walk into the wardrobe, with the clothing on either side in rails, and in front of her on shelves. Tactility

of fabrics becomes a fundamental part of dressing, as the clothing touches her in the narrowness of the closet; furthermore as the totality of clothing is not only arrayed in front of her, but rather is behind, above and below her – a degree of disorder is permitted through such organisation (the relationship between order and disorder will be discussed later). Here the spatial organisation of the wardrobe involves the clothing surrounding her, as it physically reaches her body on either side. However, in the case of the conventional wardrobe, the process of dressing involves standing looking at the clothing in front of the person in a relationship of physical distance.

The spatial organisation of all wardrobes – with a shelf area, and a rail – delimits and enables the dual practices of folding and hanging. Therefore items which are ordinarily worn on the body, sit either in a square piled piece of fabric, or hanging limp on a hanger. Given the position of the rail in the wardrobe, horizontally across the top of the wardrobe, when hung, only a glimpse of the edge of each item of clothing is visible. As the woman stands looking at her wardrobe, the relationship is primarily visual, entailed by the physical distance, as the rail positions all clothing as potential items to be selected from. Yet only the colours are visible and in order to see the entire item, the woman has to touch, and lift the item, as a part of the process of selection. Women have to translate the clothing on the hanger to how they imagine they would look in it, often through the reconstructed memory of how they did look in it. In dressing women have to reconnect the totality of the edges of their clothing contained within a piece of furniture at which they can look, with an assembled outfit which looks good on their body. This process is

mediated through items which are known to work, imaginings of how they have looked in the past or might now look, and the inevitable processes of trying clothing on.

The moment of dressing starts with the wardrobe doors being opened, or the drapes being pulled back, as common to almost all wardrobes is some form of covering for the clothing, be it a door or a drape. Not only does this functionally prevent clothing damage through exposure to sunlight and dust, it also has the effect of shutting off the clothing into a private, distinct area, only visible when opened. In almost all cases, clothing is primarily stored in the bedroom; the only exceptions being when clothing was kept in a spare bedroom which is not occupied frequently. The wardrobe is thus a waking presence, kept in a secluded part of the house, only to be seen by the woman herself. In almost all cases where women lived with their partners, they shared wardrobe space and as such their clothing would be seen by their partner or children. The privacy engendered by the wardrobe's presence in the bedroom is heightened by the covering of each wardrobe, which has to be opened to reveal the clothing within. Like Russian dolls which contain ever-increasing inaccessible levels of privacy, within the enclosed, private domain of the home is the bedroom, the innermost enclave within this is the wardrobe.

In all cases, clothing spills out throughout the whole house, not just confined within the wardrobe. The different locations clothing finds itself in the house, relate to how often it is worn, if it is about to be disposed of, or if it is part of clothing's ordinary household cycle of laundering. For transitional clothing (which was about to be thrown out or clothing that was 'out of season') many women use suitcases, or boxes under the bed,

even black bin-liners. One woman, Joanna, even had an entire storage room devoted to unwanted clothing and other household items. For clothing that is worn all of the time, many women kept such items out of the wardrobe for ease of access, in a temporary location such as a chair in the bedroom, or coats kept on a rail in the stairs, to be grabbed on the way out of the house. Items such as the jeans that are always put on after a day at work never make it to the wardrobe, as they are worn so habitually, they are placed on the bedroom chair so the wardrobe never has to be negotiated. The storage of clothing is not static, it moves within different domains of the house, which similarly entails separate practices: of laundry, maintenance, sorting, tidying and wearing (Gregson and Beale, 2004).

Table 1 on the following page demonstrates how many wardrobes women have, and how many items of clothing are contained within. With the exception of Nom (who is only temporarily residing in Britain and thus has very few clothes), all women have spaces for both hanging and folding. Rather than necessarily being enclosed within the main hanging wardrobe, most women had a separate chest of drawers, within which folded clothing was kept.

Table 1: Number of wardrobes and clothing quantities.

	No. of wardrobes (hanging)	No. of wardrobes (folded)	other spaces	No. of items (clothing)
Rosanna	2	2	0	135
Clare	1	2	0	64
Alice	1	1	2	67
Gemma	1	1	0	86
Akane	1	2	0	39
Helen	1 1/2	1	2	104
Emanuela	1	2	0	110
Nom	1	0	0	35
Anna	1	0	1	47
Louise	1	0	1	97
Lydia	1	1	0	155
Faye	1	2	0	73
Mumtaz	4	3	1	182
Patsy	2	1	0	176
Theresa	1	1	1	154
Sonya	1	2	0	109
Margaret	2	1	0	87
Joanna	1	1	1	83
Sarah	1	1	1	54
Marie	1	1	0	72
Sadie	1	0	2	81
Lisa	2	1	0	76
Sandra	1	1	1	110
Rosie	4	2	0	151
Jane	1	1	0	58
Pat	2	2	0	108
Vivienne	1	1	0	129

Most women had 2/3 wardrobes/chests of drawers; the largest number being Mumtaz's 7 wardrobes, and Rosie's 6. Both these women do have vast quantities of clothing (with Mumtaz having the most at 182 items); however the relationship between wardrobe space and number of items cannot be presumed. Broadly speaking there is a correlation between greater wardrobe space and quantity of clothing; however whether the amounts of clothing lead to the acquisition of greater wardrobe space, or the amounts of wardrobe space available lead to its being filled with clothing, is not universal. Indeed common to

almost all wardrobes is that all available space is filled, fulfilling the wardrobes structural prerogatives. The amounts of clothing possessed also links to overall household space. For example Rosie and her husband own their home, and in the 3 spare rooms, Rosie has at least one wardrobe space in each. The amount of clothes and wardrobes interacts with household space. This interaction becomes even more complex given the diverse strategies for storage within the wardrobe. Many wardrobes have clothes spilling out of them, and crammed on the hanging rail extremely tightly, whereas some other women never have more than one item per hanger. There is broadly speaking a relationship between the number of wardrobes possessed, and number of items of clothing; given the diversity of such practices, and differences in wardrobe size, this relationship is not absolute.

The contents of the wardrobe:

The previous section on the clothes that seem to defy the prescribed spatial arrangements, makes it apparent that the wardrobe's structure delimits possibilities for the ways in which clothes are stored. The structure of the wardrobe does not necessarily determine subsequent organizing strategies. Rather, drawing from Lefebvre (1991), 'space' is a complex dialectic between historically and socially produced discourses of space, users of space, and the particular practices that inhere to spatial forms. Lefebvre introduces the concept of spatialisation – the processes through which space is continually produced – combining the discursive (spatial metaphors), normative and empirical (spatial practice) (Shields, 1991). Therefore, understandings of the wardrobe as a spatial structure need to

incorporate the potentialities of wardrobe, dominant discourses of usage, the materiality of clothing and consequent spatial practices. De Certeau (1984) is useful in explicating the relationship between dominant spatial narratives and spatial practices. The regulated spatial field sets up a range of possibilities, which are actualised or not in particular spatial practices. Thus the wardrobe is structured to enable the potential practices of hanging, and folding. Furthermore the size of the wardrobe prescribes the limits of clothing women are able to have, women adopting diverse strategies, as the clothing spreads to chairs or stair rails.

The numbers of items represented in Table 1 are based upon the initial wardrobe interview carried out with each woman. As such the numbers represent a moment in the life-cycle of the wardrobe, given the constant shifts in size, as new clothes are acquired, thrown away or taken to be repaired. As almost all women filled their wardrobe spaces, the limitations of wardrobe space did mean that the amount of clothing women had remained relatively constant, as newly acquired items ousted older ones. The numbers represent every item of clothing hanging, folded and otherwise in the wardrobes, and chests of drawers that women owned on the occasion of the first wardrobe interview. Not included are: clothing about to be thrown out (and kept in bin-liners, therefore not even in the wardrobe), or underwear (given that not all women were willing for me to go through this). As some women were students, and thus living in temporary accommodation, many of their clothes were at their parents' houses. Therefore, such numbers are not included here. Furthermore the numbers in themselves are not precise; as has already been mentioned, at the moment of the interview, often women were less keen to go through

their 'boring' clothes. In these few instances, informed estimates were used, based upon my observations. The numbers I have are therefore not definitive, yet are useful in both showing a moment in terms of how many items women had, and also in enabling a comparison to be made between the women. Broadly speaking, those with a greater quantity of clothing tended to be both older, reasonably well off, and living in some form of permanent residence with more space for clothes. This general trend would seem to suggest that rather than the wardrobes of younger women being overburdened with frivolous items of fashion, in fact the wardrobe is an accumulation of items over a long period of time. Women with more space are afforded the luxury of keeping such items within their wardrobes. The wardrobe is not a static collection, but rather a combination of both accumulated items with dynamic processes of active, and reactivated clothing, and diverse practices such as disposal, acquisition and maintenance of clothing.

The general organising principle of the wardrobe rests upon clothing that is hung up, and clothing that is 'folded' (often this may be less disciplined as clothing is screwed up). The undesignated areas of the wardrobe – such as the bottom of the hanging area invariably find themselves filled with shoes. Such spatial practices emerge in the interstices of the dominant practices of the wardrobes, perhaps as a means of dealing with excess clothing, or the practicalities of containing all 'clothing' within one domain. The key determinants in positioning clothing as hung or folded that emerge are: 'special' or not, the materiality of the item (type, fabric), season and domains. These orders intersect. For example, Clare has within her wardrobe 5 'special' items, all hung together at one end of the hanging section: including a black skirt with diamante trim, a red velvet skirt and top, a feathered

black dress, a two-tone satin red and purple dress and a raw silk bronzed skirt. Each item has been worn only once. Their positioning as hung items arises out of the type of clothing: dresses are always hung (with the exception of perhaps cotton summer ones). Furthermore shirts and smart trousers are invariably found hanging, which relates to both function (as 'smart' items) and their capacity to crease. Items such as tops or jumpers form a more ambiguous position, sometimes being hung, other times being folded. Such decisions often focus upon available space, the function of the item (often if they are for smart or work-wear then they will be hung) and the fabric, if the top has for example more details on it (such as beading) it is invariably hung. Categorisation into types of clothing is more important for folded clothing, with all women having a separate drawer for underwear (many segmenting this up further into one for bras, knickers, and one for socks), and for t-shirts; some women again segmented this into long sleeved and short sleeved, or as pale and dark t-shirts. The majority of women also folded jeans (usually kept together), and other casual trousers.

The materiality of clothing is therefore important in categorisation in terms of what type of item it is, and as the examples of Clare's dresses shows fabric is also important: made of silk, velvet, satin, feathered. A fear of the ruining or creasing the delicate fabrics when folded, leads to them being hung. Such fabrics are also crucial in designating the dress as 'special'; as the item has only been worn once, being placed in the wardrobe on its own individual hanger designates it as something distinct, rather than in a pile of indistinct clothing. Often such items have clear plastic around them to further preserve and

segregate the item; as items worn only once, such items are not only being hung as a 'type' of clothing, but perhaps as a means of preserving memories.

As well as type, fabric and occasions, a fundamental ordering that emerged was organisation into domains: home, work, holidays, functional (such as for sport) and 'going-out' clothing. The various positioning of this clothing does differ between women, with home wear often being in its own drawer, yet for other women, as worn so frequently it is positioned on a chair in the bedroom or even on the floor. Functional clothing is invariably kept in its own drawer, as often is holiday wear (which coincides with seasonal wear, most women having summer and winter clothing). The existence of 'work-wear' is fundamental, even for those who do not have a designated work uniform. Often such clothing is not kept in a separate wardrobe or drawer, with items such as work trousers or shirts usually all kept in one grouping on the hanging rail, thus facilitating ease of access, and the distinction between home and work. How the wardrobe is ordered and organised enables the women to organise life-realms through the clothing worn to different domains. Women are not just ordering shirts, but are also regulating their lives.

The mirror side of the ordering of work wear is the presence of a 'fun' order of the wardrobe; many working women had small sections of the wardrobe for such items. Marie has an entire drawer full of "interesting" tops, with slogans or cartoon characters printed on them, in lighter colours. Such clothing falls in clear opposition to her clearly defined work clothing consisting of navy blue and grey. Similarly Rosie refers to her "fun" drawer; tending to wear black tops to work, this drawer in opposition is full of

brightly coloured patterned tops. Although the constitution of these drawers is similar to many other women's going-out tops or summer clothing, the conceptualisation is important, as 'fun', in contrast to darker coloured, plain work clothing.

The 'fun' order clearly has aesthetic underpinnings; a small proportion of the women interviewed (4 of them) consciously organised their entire wardrobe aesthetically. There is therefore a distinction between most women who order it primarily in terms of types of clothing, and those who do it aesthetically – although there are overlaps. For example, Alice – a former fashion MA student – has ordered her clothing on the occasion of this interview into colour domains. The organisation is incredible; of the 54 hanging items they are ordered thus (from left to right): 9 denim items, 4 pink items, 1 peach item, one white and pink item, navy blue, blue and purple, red, 4 green, turquoise, white and yellow, white and blue, 3 white, 2 grey, 11 black, 1 camel, 2 black and white, 1 camel, pale brown, beige, cream, camel, 2 yellow, 1 brown, white, blue and turquoise and white. Not only are items grouped together in terms of colours, the colour domains are in fact placed together so as to blend into each other in complementary hues. On another occasion of my being in front of her wardrobe she has reorganised it in terms of prints and types of patterns – in a similarly systematic way. In common with the other women who ordered their wardrobes thus, the key ordering is based upon how the clothing appears; Alice wants her wardrobe to be a pleasing aesthetic totality⁵.

Such a conscious ordering has clear implications for how assemblages are made: as, on making selections, the wearer is presented with a colour spectrum, rather than an

⁵ This particular form of aesthetic ordering is in part due to the fact that she was a fashion student.

intermingling of colours and patterns, where ordering occurs in terms of type of clothing or function. When clothing is ordered in terms of type of clothing, an item is selected from a category. The outfit is conceptualised as an assemblage of types of clothing (such as a skirt, t-shirt and cardigan); the first decisions are therefore made regarding what types of clothing will be selected and the subsequent points for deliberation are colours and fabrics. In opposition a wardrobe organised in terms of colours lends itself to initial decisions being made regarding which colours will be worn. However, there is not a straightforward correlation between those who organise in terms of colours or types and two types of dresser. In fact ordering into types of clothing is more common within folded clothing, as hanging clothing involves the overlapping of many orderings. Such orders are being delineated here in order to point to the implications such ordering has for dressing, rather than a prescribed relationship. As will emerge later in the thesis, often women may decide on an item (colour, fabric and type) from which there will be other decisions; therefore the primary decision is never necessarily based on colour or type.

The implications for women who order their wardrobes aesthetically are dual. Firstly some women who organised their clothing into colours or prints do so as their perception of clothing and how assemblages are made is primarily in terms of aesthetics, and how colours complement or clash with each other. However, for many other women this ordering is based upon a crucial awareness of sartorial normativity; they are clearly aware of what colours 'go' together, and dressing involves the negotiation of getting this 'right'. Which types of clothing 'go' together are so taken for granted, that when the wardrobe is ordered thus, they are able to pick colours that go together in order to avert potential

disasters. Alice is an extreme example in ordering her entire wardrobe aesthetically, yet most women have a small section within the wardrobe for a particular favourite colour.

Frequency of wearing:

The overlapping orderings or aesthetics, function, domain and type of clothing all carry implications for the moment of dressing; a key facet in the management of this moment is how often clothing is worn. The hanging area of the wardrobe in particular contains rarely worn items, habitual wear and work wear: the relationship between active and inactive clothing is complex. Here I will consider the extent to which temporality impacts upon the wardrobe's ordering, in terms of clothing that is part of the active cycle of selection, clothing that may be reintroduced to that and clothing that is no longer worn. The spatial organisation of the wardrobe plays a defining role. When clothing is folded in piles in drawers, only the top of the pile is visible, and is more likely to be worn often; in need of a change, women may go to the item below that, yet to rummage through all of them disrupts the orderliness of a folded pile, which often affects whether women will bother or not. Moreover, the visibility and accessibility of clothing in the hanging wardrobe is affected by how many items are on each hanger and the positioning of the doors. Some wardrobes have a sliding door, or hidden recesses which are not within easy access; as a consequence, clothing that is rarely worn is pushed to the peripheries, in effect massively reducing the active wardrobe.

It was extremely common, when interviewing women, for us to encounter several items of clothing the women did not realise she still possessed, or even items she was unsure

how they got there at all. This tendency is increased amongst women who have wardrobes with sliding doors, or deep drawers, yet was still present with women whom even had access to the entirety of their wardrobe. For example, Lydia has a large conventional style wardrobe, with 2 doors that open in the centre; however, she only wears clothing on the left hand side of the wardrobe. This example is not unique, and demonstrates that women clearly have strategies for separating out their habitual clothing, from that they rarely wear. It becomes a way of coping with the sheer quantity of clothing they have or to make decisions more easily. Such ordering clearly impacts upon assemblages and when the wearer wants a quick, failsafe decision to be made, the clothing that is worn all the time is easy to access.

This makes apparent that much clothing is not worn habitually. The actual percentages of clothing that women wore are represented below. The number of items worn is obtained from the initial wardrobe interview. The other percentages, relating to how often the clothing is worn, are based both upon what women told me, their clothes diaries and my own observations of whether clothing was worn throughout the year. The inactive clothing incorporates unworn and formerly worn clothing and; potential clothing incorporates clothing that is worn rarely or sometimes or indeed clothing that is tried on, even if it never leaves the bedroom; active clothing includes work clothing, clothing worn often or habitually. The break down of the number of items in each section is available in a table in Appendix 2; the reason for dividing the clothing up thus, is to show how much of women's wardrobes is actually being selected from daily.

Table 2: Active: potential: inactive clothing. Frequencies of wearing

	how many items	% inactive	% potential	% active
Rosanna	135	41.48	37.04	21.48
Clare	64	1.56	40.63	57.81
Alice	67	0	56.72	43.28
Gemma	86	26.74	52.34	20.92
Akane	39	0	58.97	41.03
Helen	104	21.15	55.77	23.08
Emanuela	110	4.54	69.09	26.37
Nom	35	2.86	51.43	45.71
Anna	47	6.38	46.81	46.81
Louise	97	34.02	26.8	39.18
Lydia	155	10.97	73.55	15.48
Faye	73	2.74	57.53	39.73
Mumtaz	182	21.43	51.65	26.92
Patsy	176	19.32	52.27	28.41
Theresa	154	24.03	46.1	29.87
Sonya	109	1.83	65.14	33.03
Margaret	87	2.3	50.57	47.13
Joanna	83	4.81	50.6	44.58
Sarah	54	11.11	53.7	35.19
Marie	72	4.17	30.56	65.27
Sadie	81	25.93	35.8	38.27
Lisa	76	2.63	35.53	61.84
Sandra	110	20.91	50	29.09
Rosie	151	10.6	47.68	41.72
Jane	58	6.9	56.89	36.21
Pat	108	0	53.7	46.3
Vivienne	129	20.93	58.14	20.93
averages:	98.5	12.2	50.55	37.25

The broad pattern emerging from the data is that, on average, 12.2% of clothing is inactive, 50.55% of clothing has the potential to be worn, whereas 37.25% of clothing forms the active wardrobe, from which women select clothing all the time. There is thus more active clothing than inactive. The reasons and constitutions behind such patterns are complex, raising issues over clothing that used to be worn all the time, inherited clothing, gifted clothing, aspirational clothing and clothing bought for events, that the wearer

wishes they could wear. These issues will be explicated throughout the thesis. There are, however, evident discrepancies to the broad pattern above and worthy of mention here; several of the women have significantly lower percentages of inactive clothing (Akane in fact has 0% of her clothing in this category). Such women are almost all younger (early 20s), and as such have yet had time to accumulate vast quantities of clothing; moreover, as will emerge from the rest of my fieldwork, women have less clearly defined sartorial selves when they are younger, and thus clothing that is no longer worn, tends to be discarded. In a similar vein, at the opposite end of the spectrum are those women who have very high levels of inactive clothing (10 women have over 19% of clothing that is inactive). These women, tend to be older (mid-30s to early 60s), and as such have acquired more former selves, memories through clothing and indeed have the resources, and in a better financial position and thus the space in which to store them.

However, several of these women are in fact younger, such women being characterised as having had a lifestyle change, a rupture which was constituted and reflected sartorially. For example Louise, has a similar percentages of active and inactive clothing (39 and 34 respectively) yet less potential clothing. Having had such an aforementioned lifestyle change, she either wears her clothing or not, as she is unable to financially afford to buy new clothing she 'might' wear. In the instances of Vivienne and Gemma their active wardrobe is in fact smaller than their inactive clothing. Such a pattern emerges as both women are extremely 'habitual' in their clothing, having a small pool of clothing that they wear all the time, rather than a range from which they draw. Similarly there are a group of women whom have the highest percentages of habitual clothing, such as Clare,

Marie and Lisa, all of whom do not have vast quantities of clothing, have clearly defined work domains and thus tend to wear all the clothing that they own. Thus the issues that are pertinent are: the discrepancies between lifestyle and clothing, financial resources and therefore space.

Order and disorder:

The shifting cycles of active clothing intersect with orders such as types of clothing or domains; such an ordering is not prescribed by the structure of the wardrobe. Here the processes of spatialisation (Lefebvre, 1991) incorporate the acts of wearing, with practices of positioning clothing, and with the pre-existing structure of the wardrobe. However the wardrobe's structuring also has wider ramifications in terms of the rationalization of space, and normative discourses of order and control. As a spatial domain that promotes the rational organisation of space, the wardrobe is designed for the ordering of clothing. The linking of ordered clothing to control is explicitly made in the discourses of companies that specialise in wardrobe organisations (such as The Holding Company, discussed in Cwerner 2001). Their aim is to enable people to control their clothing rather than the opposite: that clothing overwhelms the person. Such a normative notion of control is evidenced in the regular sort-outs that women felt compelled to do every few months, as the clothes start to escape from the confines prescribed by the wardrobe. An exemplary wardrobe in this sense of rational order is Theresa's, for whom all items in the wardrobe are clearly compartmentalised; clothing is ordered in terms of type and within this items are colour co-ordinated. She even has a separate section of the wardrobe for former clothing that she no longer wears but loves; even the memories are

clearly organised and regimented. Even when items are worn, they find their place back in the same spatial location in the wardrobe. She also has a biannual switchover of her clothing according to seasons, as clothing is swapped from the bin-liners in her daughter's wardrobe to become current clothing in her wardrobe. Such rationalisation of space is clearly evidenced in the rest of her home, and indeed life. Despite having 2 small children, there is no evidence of the customary children's toys littering the floor, as they are always packed away in designated boxes. The wardrobe reflects and is clearly part of her general sense of ordering in her life – yet moreover the specific ordering in the wardrobe enables the process of getting dressed and the selection of items. Such ordering is evidenced in almost all other wardrobes in the designation of, for example, work clothing. Degrees of ordering clearly enable the process of getting dressed, yet within this the ordering of the wardrobe enables sartorial management of wider aspects of women's lives: such as dressing appropriately for work, as a mother, for the pub with friends and so on.

Not all women organise their wardrobes to such an extent, which in turn invariably links in to how much of the clothing is actually worn. Rosanna exemplifies a defiance of this rationalisation, as someone for whom 41.8% of her clothing is inactive. Still in her mid-20s, not having experienced any major life-shifts, instead she is someone who has a rapid turnover of clothing, mostly acquired from car boot sales or second hand shops. She buys vast amounts of cheap, brightly coloured, extravagant items, most of which she knows she will never wear. Her wardrobe is depicted in photo 2 (shown previously, on page 87), and the presence of such clothing is fundamental to her experience of dressing and of her

wardrobe. As a walk-in wardrobe, she is thus surrounded by exuberant patterned, glittering items of clothing, even though the clothing she selects on a day to day basis forms a pile on the shelf at the back of the wardrobe: usually jeans and a vest top or jumper. She loves her wardrobe as a whole, and the aesthetic experience of standing in it, yet her relationship to such clothing is rarely as potential clothing to be worn. Rather it incorporates her fantasy of what dressing should be – such clothing she only wears when she has hours to try items on.

This notion of fantasy, also leads on to the disorder of her wardrobe. Underneath the rails on the right hand side, and floor shelves, stuffed full of tops, none are folded but rather they wind about it each other in spirals of colours and fabrics. Similarly the items are interspersed on the rails – her fantastical items from the charity shop mix in with items she does sometimes wear. This disordered state is not a mere accident, as in fact she has a 3 monthly clear out of clothing; she actively cultivates this experience of being overwhelmed by her clothing. Whilst the rest of her flat continues the aesthetic of bright exotic colours, each room painted a different, vibrant colour, the same level of disorder is not present, it is as if the separate room of the wardrobe is where such a fantasy is allowed presence. The disorder is thus ordered and permitted. This is an extreme example, but many women do it to a smaller degree, having a shelf or a drawer that is untamed. Even Rosanna's practices occur in the context of the normative expectations of order as materialised in the wardrobe. What Theresa makes apparent is that in actualising the rationalist philosophy of the ordering of wardrobes, she does so in order to give

herself feelings of control. Not just over the clothing, but over her life, a facet which mirrors much of the ordering of wardrobes (such as into work clothing and home wear).

Conclusion:

The focus of this thesis is upon explicating the moment of getting dressed, as a moment of actualisation of the social self from a personal collection of clothing. The most appropriate methodology involves the presence of the researcher at moments of dressing, a presence only possible through ethnography. A crucial aspect of this was the development of a rapport and intimacy with women I worked with, rather than working on a superficial level with many women. In the instances where an intensive ethnographic involvement was not possible, various other strategies were adopted in order to access the moment of getting dressed, such as clothes diaries or discussions with women of various outfits selected. The virtue of an anthropological approach is the emphasis upon context; context was understood in terms of wider aspects of women's lives and relationships. The immediate context for the act of getting dressed is however the wardrobe; therefore the second half of this chapter outlines the generic character of wardrobes as it emerges from my fieldwork. As a physical structure, the wardrobe delineates and permits particular clothing storage practices; however the relative diversity of wardrobe practices I encountered means that the wardrobe structure is not determining. The commonalities between all wardrobes are the orderings into: type of item, function, fabric, domain, whether it is special or habitual. The latter aspect introduces the importance of not only structural orderings, but also temporal orderings pertaining to the active and inactive cycles of clothing within the wardrobe.

These orderings are all necessary in understanding how women select outfits, seen in the differences between women who order the wardrobe aesthetically, and those who do so in terms of types of item. For example, women who order their wardrobes in terms of colour domains, often conceptualise the outfit in terms of aesthetics, and thus select items in terms of the complementarity of colours. This also raises a crucial aspect of assemblage, which is the narrative consequentiality of the selection of items of clothing. The ordering of the wardrobe facilitates this process; in a simplified form, women who, for example, select a shirt for work, may as a consequence select a pair of work trousers. However given that the orders of the wardrobe are overlapping: items may be simultaneously a particular colour, yet also serve a particular function, for a particular domain, made in a certain fabric. As such, the process of the assemblage of outfits mobilises multiple and overlapping orders. The ordering of wardrobes serves to make this moment of assemblage easier. Interestingly, an order that was notable by its absence was the presence of outfits of clothing, together in the wardrobe; as such, there is always an element of creative assemblage when dressing. The only cases where there were outfits were for particular occasions, or for work clothing.

The mirror side to this emphasis upon order is disorder. The normative rationalisation of space constituted by the wardrobe predicates the practice of ordering, and organisation of space. Not only do many women have an area of permitted disorder, in almost all instances the clothing managed to escape the wardrobes compartmentalisation. Firstly this relates to the practices surrounding clothing: such as washing and tidying, which

leads to the clothing passing through the domestic and spatial cycles in the house. This relationship between order and disorder is not just confined to the wardrobe but has an important relationship to how women organise their life-worlds. In the process of ordering their wardrobes into work clothes, event wear and clothing worn frequently, women are trying to facilitate the moment of dressing. As the moment of dressing involves the negotiations between the private and public selves and the anticipated gaze of others, in facilitating this moment, women are trying to mitigate against the potentially disordering facets of everyday life. The balances between orders and disorder in the wardrobe form part of this ordering of lives.

The starting point for the act of getting dressed is when women stand looking at the totality of clothing displayed in the wardrobe in front of them. For most women this involves looking at the clothing in a relationship of physical distance, which raises the question: to what extent women see themselves in their wardrobes. The following chapters aim to interrogate whether from the clothing that hangs on hangers, or folded in piles, women can see the wardrobe as an aesthetic externalisation of themselves, and how women see items that are 'me' within this aesthetic totality. As becomes evident in understanding the cycles of worn and unworn clothing, clothing in the wardrobe is not only considered in terms of current moments of wearing, as memory becomes embedded in clothing. As such, notions of the externalised self in the wardrobe, also encode the extent to which this externalisation is constituted biographically. The next 2 chapters will consider the wardrobe as an externalisation of self: firstly, looking at the temporal aspects, exploring this issue of memory and biography through clothing, and secondly,

looking at the extent to which women have a personal aesthetic, as an explicit link between appearance and a sense of self.

Chapter 3: Biography through the wardrobe: former selves and the co-presence of the past.

Continuing the previous chapter's focus upon the wardrobe as the context for getting dressed, this chapter will explore the extent to which women 'see themselves' in their wardrobes. The process through which people look at a photograph and say 'that is me' is well documented (Barthes, 1984, Sekula, 1982, Wright, 2004). The aim here is to understand how this might happen through the non-representational form of clothing. If objects are taken as an extension of the self (Belk, 1995, La Fontaine, 1985), it follows that when looking at the wardrobe women are actually considering them 'selves', or aspects of, in the external form of clothing. The next chapter will look at how this happens through the aesthetic qualities of clothing: how particular colours or textures come to constitute a personal aesthetic. As this aesthetic is cultivated over time, and the wardrobe is a personal accumulation of clothing over the life-course, I will first consider the temporal orders of the wardrobe.

Giddens defines self-identity as 'the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography' (1991: 53). A continuity of biography is fundamental to the 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991: 5). The ways in which the person establishes a sense of self is through reflexive awareness of their biography as a coherent trajectory, spanning from the past through to the future. Central to his argument is that self-identity is a project and as part of this biography, rather than just being a pre-existing 'given', is consciously engaged with, and indeed manipulated in order to establish a

stability of self-identity. Although Giddens is concerned primarily with verbal and written narrative biographies, this raises the possibility that the wardrobe may form part of this biographical project. Often accounts on Western fashion focus upon the externally imposed temporality of the fashion system. As a consequence the relationship women form with their clothing is seen as fickle and ephemeral. If the focus instead is the personalised temporality of the wardrobe, it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the longer term relationship between clothing and the individual for whom the wardrobe comes to constitute an externalized form of their biography.

Whilst many items may not have been kept consciously, the act of sorting out the wardrobe and disposing of clothing may form part of this attempt to construct and control biography. Attempts to store memories inevitably also involve the mirror process of forgetting (Forty, 1999). One consideration will be the way in which clothing is used to both remember former versions of the self (Banim and Guy, 2001) and to visualise potential future selves a person might aspire to. In both cases the wardrobe represents an external and material visualisation as opposed to the internal and intangible nature of memory. As clothes are not words, the ways in which memory and biography are manipulated and externalised happen through this particular material medium. In particular, the sensuality and tactility of clothing may become important in how memories are evoked. Given the sheer volume of clothing in any given wardrobe it is evident that multiple strategies may take place: items which are only worn once may encapsulate a single event and isolated memories, or those worn habitually may encode a former self.

The relations between clothing from a 'former' stage in an individual's life, and current cycles of active clothing are complicated as clothes that lay unworn, markers of a previous time, become reactivated as they are re-worn. The past becomes a resource in constituting a contemporary identity. Denzin (1989) defines the biographical method as the studied use of 'life documents...(which) include autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, life stories, personal experience stories, oral histories, and personal histories' (Denzin, 1989: 7). Notably absent are any material artefacts which through their very materiality would differ from verbal narratives as particular externalisations of biography. Giddens defines the project of the self as a 'trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future' (1991: 75). As a documentation of a life from 'the cradle to the grave' both verbal and written biography follows particular conventions (Gullestad, 1996) of linear coherent temporality. Implicit within conventional narrative biographies is that the self is teleological, developing chronologically through previous acts, in a manner that is 'progressive, accumulated' (Stanley, 1992: 12). Given that clothing that is accumulated is reactivated, and intersects with other temporalities in the act of assemblage, notions of a linear accumulated self only depict a small aspect of biography through clothing. When a 'former' item is re-worn, it can no longer merely be part of the past.

Another defining feature of conventional narrative and verbal biographies is the ways in which narrative aspires to truth: in accurately depicting the events of a life which are seen to exist prior to narrative forms. In its most extreme form, objective 'natural history'

approaches (such as Young, 1953) placed emphasis upon how reliably the 'truth' of life could be captured. Even with the more recent shift to the interpretative, there is still an emphasis upon sequential narratives, which connect to 'actual' life events (Denzin, 1989). Such accounts assume the referentiality of words and biography (Stanley, 1992) as words are seen to 'capture' a life directly. However, the ways in which words, clothing or any other material form, may externalise biography are extremely different. When Giddens looks at how individuals construct their biographies, it is evident that this is possible through language, as words can be manipulated. A life-story, if inadequate, can be retold using different words. The possibilities of manipulation in clothing are rather different: if clothing fails to capture the biography the person wishes to construct, the only available option is to throw the item away. If kept, the clothing confronts the person with things they may otherwise have wished to forget. Clothing is not just open to be manipulated by the wearer, nor is it a secondary representation of events or a biography, yet will be discussed here as fundamentally constitutive of the life that is lived.

Personal biography through the wardrobe: ruptures and former selves.

As the previous section demonstrated, a significant proportion of women's wardrobes is 'inactive'; whilst the average amount of such clothing is 12.2 %, in some cases this percentage goes up to over 40%. The presence of clothing that is not even considered when selecting an outfit may be due to the failure to sort out the wardrobe regularly or high turnovers of styles, rendering clothing obsolete once new items are purchased. To be considered here is the ways in which items that are no longer worn hang as mementoes of former selves (Banim and Guy, 2001), encapsulating memories. The majority of women I

interviewed regularly sorted through their clothing, and as such the no-longer-worn items are consciously kept. The process of sorting through the wardrobe involves the sorting out of memories: deciding which former facets of the self or memories are to be discarded or kept, yet always from the perspective of the present. Within this thesis it will be argued that clothing externalises aspects of the self. As such, the wardrobe may be a form through which women may be able to reflect upon various facets of themselves in order to make sense of, and construct their own biographies.

The first case study to be considered is that of Theresa, for whom clothing that is no longer worn forms a quarter of her wardrobe. Characteristic of other women with quantities of such clothing, Theresa has experienced a biographical and sartorial rupture. Such life-shifts correspond either to a shift in relationship status (with the acquisition of a permanent partner resulting in the abandonment of 'on the pull' clothing) or to a change in working status. Theresa forms an example of the latter; yet for her the life change is even more marked. Theresa and her husband have recently moved to a rural suburb of London, where she used to work in the corporate sector, even after her 2 children were born. However, once the children's vocal capacities had developed from the wailings and screamings of babies to the persistent inquisitive musings of toddlers, Theresa was keen to relinquish her job and become a full time mother. Her primary occupation is now being a housewife: looking after the children, and engaging in various projects around their new house, such as decorating, feeding the animals and tending to the garden.

The clothing she keeps is not an accidental by-product of bad organisation; as discussed in the previous chapter, Theresa's wardrobe is so regimented that even her memories are clearly ordered. The cessation of her working life became the occasion for a wardrobe sort out, as many of her suits, dresses and shirts that were in good condition have been given to her mother to sell on to a second hand shop. Many she chose to keep. Hanging on the left hand side of her wardrobe are the remnants of her working life. The plastic suit bags which enclose them manifest her desire to preserve the suits, and the aspects of her self they embody. The items she has kept are those which she remembers made her "feel really good when I wore them". For example, she has a fitted, long, marl grey jacket which was her "lucky jacket. I felt really confident in it". Although she knows she will never wear it again, as it is too "office-y", given the colour and the style, the mystical qualities she has attributed to it make her reluctant to part with it. In keeping the item, Theresa wishes to retain the memories and former aspects of her working self. The particular ways in which clothing holds the self and memory in external form is crucial for understanding how the wardrobe may form an externalised biography.

Hoskins (1998) explicitly addresses the ways in which objects may be 'biographical', based upon work with the Kodi of Eastern Indonesian island of Sumba: a society which she notes lacks the tradition of telling your life story, unlike contemporary Britain. As such, the past is accessed and understood through objects. Although this is an extremely different social context to the one in which I was working, it is relevant in terms of understanding how objects may form an extension of the self, and may be used in the construction of auto-biographies. One object she places particular emphasis upon is the

betel bag, which is owned by all adults and always carried around with the person. As a constant companion, the object becomes imbued with the owner's personality, and in many instances even becomes a metaphor for the self. Hoskins cites an example of where a betel bag is buried in lieu of a person. The bag may come to stand for aspects and attributes of the person who owns it.

Objects are pivots for "reflexivity and introspection, a tool of auto-biography, self-discovery, a way of knowing oneself through things" (Hoskins, 1998: 198). Therefore, an object not only forms an extension of the self but may also be the locus for knowledge and memories. When certain stories or local traditions are forgotten the person is able to access these through the betel bag. If the self is extended through objects, the person is able to stand outside of, and reflect upon themselves. For Theresa, when she is sorting out her wardrobe she is considering aspects of her former self, as externalised through the clothing. As this exists in an external form Theresa is attempting to retain these memories, rather than rely on the interiorised, unreliability of memory in the mind. Such memories do not need to be part of her active conscious mind, but as they are present in the wardrobe, may be accessed on demand. The wardrobe forms part of Theresa's attempt to store her memories and order her biography through her clothing.

One of the reasons such clothing is able to form a significant extension of who she used to be is that it was worn habitually; her entire working life was carried out in these clothes. All the clothing she wore was in a particular style: shift dresses, and matching suit jackets. Worn over a period of 10 years this shape and look became definitive of

Theresa's working wardrobe. This defined clothing forms a stark stylistic contrast to her current aesthetic; as these items were worn only to work, they evoke vividly her former working life. As Hoskins (1998) points out, objects may be the cause of reflection on the self, through which people are able to construct their biography. The 'former' clothing is relevant to Theresa in terms of how she constructs and legitimates her current position in life. Whilst not wishing to return to this lifestyle, she does not want to relinquish the knowledge that she used to be this person. Banim and Guy (2001) in discussing why women keep clothing they no longer wear, point to the connectivities between former items and current identities. One of the means through which this is achieved is through establishing continuity between the former and the contemporary. Yet for Theresa such a continuity is achieved through contrast. This contrasting self is enabled through the disparity between her former and current clothing styles. In keeping this clothing, she is able to both acknowledge that she has the capacity to be such a different person, and to legitimate her current status and lifestyle choice as a housewife and mother. As such, the 'former' outfits are not relegated to the past, even though they are currently not worn. They are utilised in the construction and justification of a current identity; like all forms of memory they are seen from the perspective of the present.

The selection of particular items of clothing and the discarding of others, in the constitution of a biography through clothing, is in many ways similar to the creation of a photo-album. Such albums are usually ordered chronologically (Chalfen, 1987), an ordering of photographs of significant occasions. 'Bad' photographs, which are deemed as insignificant or taken on an unhappy occasion, are usually culled (Belk, 1995, Sontag,

1979). As Bourdieu points out (1990), on being placed in an album the 'good moment' is transformed into a 'good memory' (1990: 27), a memory which becomes even more concretised as the photo is repeatedly looked at. Within the wardrobe, the outfits which embody bad memories, or were a failure are thrown away; the very fact that the no-longer-worn item has been consciously kept demarcates it as a 'former' self or a significant memory. The ordering of both clothes and photos may enable the construction of a particular biographical progression. However, unlike clothing, photographs are primarily representational (even though they are clearly not a direct representation of reality). The ways in which the self may be externalised through the photograph is through a depiction of particular people⁶, made evident when someone looks a photo and says 'that is my father' (Wright, 2004), as if the representation on the photograph embodies and reanimates the person. The photograph visually presences a person, yet the clothing that hangs in the wardrobe is notable by the absence of the body.

For example, Theresa still possesses a stretchy cotton and viscose dress she wore when pregnant, which, throughout the gestation period, expanded to incorporate her swelling stomach. Ordinarily with such fabric, the elastane fibres stretch over the body, retracting when the body is no longer encapsulated within and the clothing returns to its former shape. Yet given the extent of stretching, and that Theresa wore it constantly throughout the 9 month period, the material is disfigured around the centre. She "can't bear to throw it out", wanting to embrace and reminisce over this period: the transition to her current motherhood status. She has thrown out most of her other maternity dresses, which tended

⁶ I will discuss in a later chapter how photographs depicting people in favourite items of clothing may be significant, or impact upon how women choose outfits.

to be loose cotton. Central to this item is that it carries her personalised individual shape. The transitional and fluctuating stage of pregnancy is concretised and made permanent through the dress. Ordinarily the clothing that hangs in the wardrobe is characterised by its disembodiment, as it hangs life-like on rails. Yet here the clothing, stretched and worn habitually, manages to presence this absence⁷. She would not just be throwing out a dress, but rather she would be throwing out her own externalised pregnant body. In the example of her work suits, the continuity of identity is established through contrast. Here the emphasis on continuity is even more important, as whilst this transitory period of pregnancy is not one she will return to, it is foundational to her current lifestyle as a mother, and so too is the dress which embodies this.

In various other ways clothing also materially externalises memory. Theresa, now in her mid 30s, still has a petrol blue silk shirt she bought almost 20 years ago. There are several rips within the fabric, and it is starting to fray in places, through over wearing. It is soft and smooth to the touch, as Theresa talks about it she strokes it fondly, telling me how it brings back so many memories, when she made her first cheeky foray to the pub at the age of 16 and to the first 18th birthday party she went to. She remembers the excitement she felt at buying it as it was the first silk shirt she ever had, and seemed very expensive at the time from Hobbes. It was her “most dressy and exciting item”, and even now she can recount the way she felt when she wore it her hair spiked up, the soft fabric caressing the skin, and in its voluminousness how, when her body moved, so too the shirt strokes her body in undulations of sensuous material. Here the sensuality of the item is crucial in

⁷ Some of the idea for this were derived from Forty's discussion (1999) of Holocaust memorials, and the problems of commemoration these create. Whilst extremely different examples he raises the complex, shifting and indirect ways memory is both made present, yet also absent through objects.

evoking this period for her. Photographs visually depict the aesthetics of an item, and enable the person to re-imagine themselves in that period through how they used to look in the item. The feel of the soft silk on her hands enables Theresa to re-imagine herself through the sensuality of the item, enables her to reconstruct what it felt like to wear the clothing.

This shows the ways in which clothing, as opposed to photos or other material objects, externalises memory and biography is through this sensuality. When clothing is understood phenomenologically, from the perspective of the wearer, as an embodied experience (Entwistle, 2000), the importance of such sensual aspects of wearing becomes apparent. The wearer's perception and experience of the world arise out the bodily situatedness, as a clothed body. As such the touch of the clothing on the skin enables Theresa to be re-situated as she was when she wore it. It is through this sensuality that the wearer recaptures the potentialities of their former self. In the previous instance of Theresa's work clothes, the Aristotelian notion of *memoria* is clearly evidenced in the conscious storage of these items of clothing. However, in the instance of her ripped and torn shirt, the concept developed in tandem, of *mneme*, carries resonance, the 'ability to remember by chance something previously experienced' wherein a particular synaesthetic experience of remembering is triggered (Kuechler, 1999: 54). Whilst here the objects are consciously kept, and thus not accidental, the ways in which memory works is synaesthetic. Writing on wine collectors, Belk (1995) notes that on tasting each wine, people were able to remember exactly where they were when they first tasted it. With clothing this happens through touch and feel, rather than through taste. Touching

the shirt evoked the other sensations associated with wearing the item, possible through the sensuality of the silk shirt.

When clothes, like this silk shirt, are worn all the time, their failure to regenerate like the human body, renders the items ripped and torn. Vivienne, a former BBC political journalist in her 50s, has numerous items like this; she has one such fleece, bought from Camden market which she wore daily for over a decade. The perishability of the fabric means it now hangs frayed on the back of her bedroom door; she wears it for gardening and painting, as she cannot bear to throw it out. It literally hangs together on its last seams, the materiality of clothing has in fact betrayed her desire to continue wearing it. In buying clothing to wear all the time, it is as if the wearer knows that it will one day die; yet also like a pet dog or a cat, it does not stop the wearer developing any less of a significant attachment. Vivienne prolongs the fleece's last moments and through not wearing it the life-cycle of clothing becomes frozen.

The ragged state of the fleece's disrepair, like Theresa's shirt, serves to authenticate how much it was worn and loved. Here Vivienne's item is cherished for its age-value (Riegl, 1982), not because it embodies a particular period of her life, or memories but rather as it is worn continuously, through the material biography of the item, it is valued as it shows the generic passage of time and wearing. This example also problematises the Western memory tradition, which assumes that objects are repositories of memory, akin to the human mind. Forty and Kuechler (1999) point to the need to understand that the particular processes through which objects may materialise memory, are extremely

different to the ways in which the human mind works. The propensities of an object to age, such as this fleece that is falling apart does not correspond with our desire to remember them. Its materiality resists its full incorporation into the identity of the wearer⁸.

In this instance, the physical disrepair of the items means they cannot be worn; yet in the cases of many of Theresa's former work outfits she chooses not to wear them, rather they are kept as reminders of who she used to be. There still remains a degree of ambivalence about these items, and the extent to which the past is truly terminated. Some of the items she used to wear are recombined, and do not constitute a terminated rupture. In her summer wardrobe she still has a linen long sleeved jacket with a granddad style collar. Being linen the jacket hangs relatively easily off the body, yet the jacket is structured primarily around two bulky shoulder-pads, legacies of her working days in the 1980s. Despite being a delicate fabric, when worn the effect is boxy, giving a square shape to the body. Theresa used to love wearing it to the office as it is relatively loose and "doesn't hug my body too tightly", she felt able to contrast it with tighter short skirts, and a little camisole underneath. She knows given her current activities she would not wear it ordinarily; one time I go to see her she is considering wearing it to a forthcoming parents evening. She despises the shoulder pads which locate the jacket in the 80s; yet she resolves to unpick the stitches and remove these.

⁸ A similar argument is found in Banerjee and Miller's book on the sari (2003), where the *pallu* part of the sari is seen as semi-autonomous.

Given that the jacket has no collar and the fabric is relatively informal, once the pads are taken out, and the shape is made more fluid, she feels it will be suitable to her new lifestyle, worn with a pair of jeans. The formal rigidity of the office jacket is relaxed to become assimilated into her role as a caring mother. Here an item initially relegated to her past is reactivated to reconstruct a new look: that of the effortlessly smart, multi-tasking mother. Theresa has the appropriate skills of recombination in order to not only make the item wearable again, yet to also activate facets of her former self which inhere to her working clothing within her current motherhood status. Even though her working life is over, and constitutes a terminal biographical rupture, as clothing is recombined with other items from different periods, the biography through clothing is not terminated. Aspects of her working self may be mobilised within a new outfit dependent upon how the outfit is assembled, as former moments are juxtaposed with current or more recent items. The intersection of a 'former' item of clothing with current, worn clothing challenges notions of a linear biography through clothing.

Frozen/dormant clothing:

Theresa has clothing which is no longer worn and reminds her of a former part of her life, yet she also has items which have the potential to be reactivated. Such items are not relics of a former time, but rather may be adapted and reused in the formation of current identities. The example here, Mumtaz, Theresa's sister in law, similarly involves items she wishes to wear again. Mumtaz currently lives in her parents' house in North East London, with her husband, two children and her parents. She has lived in Uganda, Kenya, India, London, and Paris. She married and lived with her first husband in India, and met

her current husband, Adam, in London, with whom she then moved to Paris with his job and to set up a family. They have now re-settled back in London. She has the largest amount of clothes of anyone I interviewed, having 7 wardrobes in total. Within her vast selection of folded clothing are numerous short stretchy Lycra skirts; a particular favourite of hers being a dulled down chocolate brown leopard print skirt. She used to wear the skirts resting on her hip-bone to elongate them, and teamed them with loose hanging tops, so an inch or so of the tight skirt peeped out from under the flowing masses of her tops. This way of dressing was very much Mumtaz's definitive style when she lived in Paris. However, despite being in her late 40s, now that she lives with her parents she feels unable to wear such short skirts. Her mother dresses in saris everyday, and would disapprove of such clothing as both inappropriate and revealing too much of the flesh on her legs. Mumtaz still loves these skirts, and although she no longer wears them, she cannot abandon the possibility that she may wear them again. It is likely she and Adam will buy their own home in London at some point soon, so away from the watchful eyes of her parents, she will be able to wear them again, without being disrespectful. The clothes lie dormant, hopeful in the possibility of being reawakened. She does not plan to make alterations to them to make them befit her current status, but rather hopes to return to wearing them in the state in which they are now.

Both the items of clothing and the former aspect of herself that they embody remain temporally frozen, their potential reactivation projected into an imagined future. Of Mumtaz's 7 wardrobe spaces, 6 are for what she calls her 'Western' clothing, and one for her 'Indian' clothing, containing mounds of silks and satins in sky-blue, verdant greens,

silvers, whites, pinks, vibrant reds and delicately adorned with embroidered patterns. The photograph below shows a selection of her Indian clothing.



Photo 3: A selection of Mumtaz's Indian clothing

When she lived in Paris, and in India, she used to have a wardrobe for her saris, as each one was hung up individually; now they are folded in piles in an inaccessible wardrobe, and she finds she rarely wears them. Below, in photograph 2, is a picture of one of Mumtaz's wardrobes. The area on the right is where her saris and Indian clothing are housed.

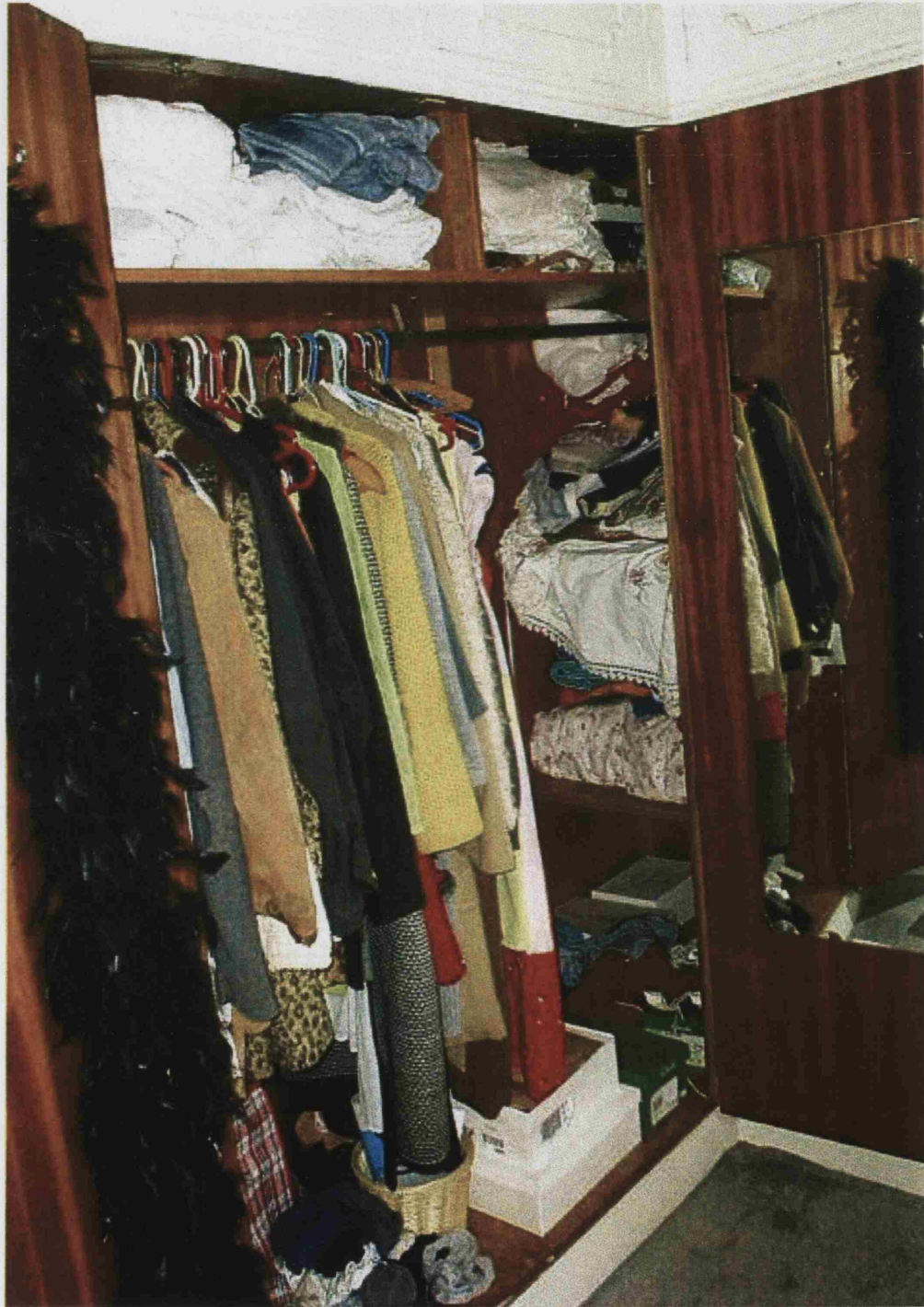


Photo 4: Mumtaz's Indian wardrobe.

When she lived in India with her first husband, she wore saris most days and acquired the requisite skills to stand and move in such items. However, now she wears these items only if she goes to the temple (she's Sikh), an 'Indian' function or a wedding, when she will be merely required to stand around looking "decorative". She prefers to wear shalwar kamiz's, now finding saris impractical and uncomfortable, as she is no longer used to wearing them, the feat of retaining the shape and dignity when wearing them being a conscious perpetual effort.

Keeping these items of clothing is very important to Mumtaz as it is a way of retaining a fundamental part of her identity. She also keeps the saris as she hopes her daughter will one day wear them. As her daughter has been brought up in Paris and London, although she has been raised a Sikh, and has been taught Urdu, Mumtaz is keen to inculcate this facet of identity into her daughter. Here the clothing is an externalised form of Mumtaz's Indian identity, and as such is a particular means through which this can be passed on to the next generation. As a long drape of material, the sari can fit any size or shape of woman, and will fit Mumtaz's daughter in the same way they fit her. In wearing the items Mumtaz hopes her daughter will take on this aspect of her biographical past; the saris thus have a particular temporal trajectory. In her discussion of cultural memory Assman (1993 cited in Kuchler 1999) delineates 2 kinds of memory which are of relevance here: eschatological and animatorical, the latter will be considered later. Eschatological memory forms a linkage between the past, present and future and therefore succeeds in 'bridging across a lost present to a desired future' (Kuchler, 1999: 60). Such modes of remembrance are evident in attitudes to cultural heritage, wherein ruins are central in

constructions of an envisioned future. In Mumtaz's example, the temporal present of the saris is frozen or 'lost', yet there is a connectivity between the 'past' aspect of Mumtaz's identity projected onto the aspired future of her daughter.

The temporal connection conjoins not only the past with the future, but also the biographies of Mumtaz and her daughter intersect. Biography through clothing is therefore not that of an isolated individual life-story, with other figures being relegated to the secondary position of shadows (Stanley, 1992). Here as the sari externalises an aspect of Mumtaz's Indian identity, this impacts upon how her daughter, in wearing it, may be able to construct herself through clothing. In the case of Theresa's maternity dress, the fact that the item takes on her body shape is central in personalising the item; yet for Mumtaz the very opposite allows her daughter to take on the sari as an aspect of her own identity.

Complex continuities and contemporary histories:

In both of the case studies presented above, a temporal trajectory emerges: as a series of ruptured temporal stages: former, current and aspired future selves through clothing. Whilst these stages are encapsulated in particular material ways through clothing – they follow a similar linear temporality to many other forms of biography (in particular through narrative). However, this linear temporality, akin to forms of biography such as narrative, is problematised in the instance of Theresa's reactivation of her former working jacket, the fact that clothing can be worn, and recombined. The two examples to be considered here explore this potentiality, through the act of wearing clothing through

many life-stages, a continuity of biography is created. The first example is one of Mumtaz's favourite saris, which she has had for 15 years; she bought the fabric - some Chantilly lace – from Paris, a material she thought was particularly beautiful and took it to a tailors in India to have cut into the right size piece – where she always takes her clothes to be adjusted or made, when she goes back twice a year. As Chantilly lace is see-through under the connecting fibres, she also had a white under-layer sewn in. This sari combines 'fashion' through the beautiful fabric bought in Paris, yet still the sari is an Indian item of clothing. The item is as 'global' as she is. Various different threads of her life are actualised in the one garment. Different moments from 'past' periods of her life fuse together to form a contemporary identity. The capacity of clothing to interweave the diverse threads of her life together creates a garment which is an externalisation of selfhood as a connectivity of various periods of her life. Therefore a biography through clothing is not a cumulative teleology, but rather here various pasts articulate together in one item.

The ways in which clothing may bring together disparate biographical periods is evidenced in clothing that is worn throughout life-changes. Vivienne, mentioned earlier, a retired political researcher in her 50s, has many items which she has worn throughout changes in her lifespan. For example she has an Afghan dress in her wardrobe, which is long, loose, cotton and heavily embroidered. The basic colours are large blocks of primary colours placed in vivid juxtaposition: burgundy, green, royal blue, arterial red. It was bought for her sister's wedding some years before, and was worn several times in the interim including to her own second wedding. She was pregnant when she got married

the second time; as the dress is loose, it was able to be worn as a pregnancy dress. The adaptability and multi-functionality of the dress incorporated various events and progressive changes in Vivienne's life. The various temporal threads of Vivienne's life are woven together and added to the threads of the clothing to create a complex biographical continuity. Clothing enabled Vivienne to establish a constancy in the self, in the face of other shifts in her life-course.

In both Mumtaz and Vivienne's cases, within individual items of clothing multiple histories and moments are made present. These items neither signify a past self, nor a present self, but rather the self as constituted through these former trajectories. This clearly problematises linear notions of temporality through clothing, and it is necessary to rethink memory not as a 'past' that is terminated. Whereas a photograph serves to 'isolate, preserve' and fix a moment (Berger, 1997: 293), when clothing is re-worn it no longer encapsulates a terminated moment. I have already outlined, through the example of Theresa, how the wardrobe may constitute means of working through personal memory, through considering her biography as it exists in the material form of clothing. Here I will look at how the self may be materialised in particular outfits, and as such, how the act of wearing may have its own temporal integrity: an item can never just be a 'former' self if it is combined and worn again. This relationship between the wardrobe and the act of dressing is an underlying theme of this thesis, and will be addressed in the next chapter. Relevant for consideration here is how this act of dressing disrupts or creates particular temporal orders of the wardrobe.

An alternative means of understanding memory and reanimations of the past is presented by Kuchler (1999) in her discussion of Malanggan – a ritual performance in New Ireland which constitutes the finishing of work for the dead. This process involves firstly the elaborate construction of architectural structures which are the site for the display of effigies, ritual performances and activities. The container is destroyed in the final moment of the ritual ceremonies, liberating the ‘soul’ of the dead, which then becomes a mobile floating image. Relevant for my argument, is that Kuchler points to the centrality of performance. In the ritual act the past is momentarily reanimated, as the participants are reminded of what is already known, the collectivity of the dead. This cultural confirmation is momentary, in the act of iconoclasm. Here ritual efficacy comes not from remembrance but from this momentary reanimation. Mentioned earlier was the ways in which memory may be eschatological (Assman, 1993 cited in Kuchler) – involving a connection between a terminated past and aspired to future. However, Assman’s opposing notion of ‘animatorical’ memory is useful here (Assman, 1993, cited in Kuchler). Rather than the past preceding the present in a linear trajectory, the past and present collapse into a single temporal moment. As such, the act of performance has its own temporal integrity, where the past and present are conjoined.

An analogy is evident between the act of performance, and the act of assemblage and wearing of an outfit. Very rarely did I encounter women who wore ‘former’ outfits in their entirety, but rather usually items become part of the active cycle of clothing as they are combined with more recent purchases. When items are worn they are never just a ‘former’ self, it is never about re-enacting a past identity. But rather, like in Kuchler’s

example, through the act of wearing the item of clothing, it is possible to temporarily reanimate the past. When Theresa decided to wear a former work jacket again, after making alterations, she was not trying to become her former working self. However the 'former' item, and the current habitually worn jeans, involve a juxtaposition of the past and present within one item. In the act of wearing both simultaneously Theresa is able to conjoin her former and current selves, as through the act of assemblage, it is possible for the past to coexist with the present in the transient moment of wearing the outfit. Like in Mumtaz's sari: various 'pasts' coalesce into a 'present'.

Unwanted former sartorial selves: sub-cultural ruptures and subsequent stability

All 3 women discussed, Mumtaz, Theresa and Vivienne, have kept the items of clothing within their wardrobe. However, Rosie, a married management consultant in her 30s, has not kept many of the items she used to wear, yet notably she is able to vividly recall her self through her remembrances of her clothing⁹. Her earlier years were characterised by a progression of defined ruptures in clothing styles through particular lifestyles and sub-cultural participations: a Goth, hippy, 'on the pull'. Her early teens coincided with her Goth clothing. Although she no longer possesses any of these clothes, she clearly remembers the hours taken to get ready after school and before she went out, layers of black eyeliner, the clothing unanimous in its blackness. The school she attended was an all-girls school, where no make up or jewellery was permitted. Pat her mother recounts one particular occasion when Boy George (Rosie's musical idol at the time) was visiting the nearby shopping centre. In a frantic rush after school to arrive in time for Rosie to

⁹ This is something that characterises almost all women I interviewed: the capacity to tell themselves through their clothes.

catch a glimpse of her hero there was no time to apply the elaborate make up, or even change her clothing. Although slightly dismayed Boy George did not see her in her Gothic get-up which she habitually wore, she was unconcerned as none of her friends would know this. However the moment of securing his autograph was photographed by a local photographer and a picture of a bespectacled Rosie, in her full school uniform appeared in the newspaper the next day. Rosie was mortified. Rosie's wardrobe at the time incorporated 2 aesthetic domains: her school uniform which she wore begrudgingly, and her Gothic clothing which embraced her entire lifestyle and selfhood, signifying which clubs she went to, what music she listened to. The clothing did not match the situation she found herself in, with humiliating consequences.

Clothing has always been a crucial means through which Rosie defined herself, which made this meeting with Boy George, captured on photographic film, all the more poignant. The school uniform was not an outfit that matched the self she constructed daily, nor that which she wanted to be portrayed as. Such clothing was clearly fundamental to her and raises the issue of why the items were thrown out. Characteristic of sub-cultures is the complete adherence to a look (Hodkinson, 2002); the transition to a new sub-culture does not involve a gradual phasing out, but rather a complete repudiation of the previous look. In her 'hippy' years, the clothing fell in complete distinction to the unflinching harsh blackness of her former clothing, and as such the clothing was thrown out.

Despite having thrown out such clothing from her earlier years, there comes a point at which Rosie has started to hold on to items. Therefore an important aspect of contrast between clothing that is kept and that which is discarded, lies in the issue of age, and experimentation. Resounding through all of the examples is a sense that the women become their 'self' at some point in their biography. As such, items from this point onwards have the potential to be recombined (items kept from before this point, tend to be mementoes, as a separated past). Whilst Rosie did have many years of experimentations she is now a high earner, and more settled having just got married and bought a house. The clothing she now favours is top designer – such as Gucci, Dolce and Gabanna and Chloe. Although there are still shifts in her clothing styles, they are more gradual. She has an array of 'fun' glittering, brightly coloured shoes and tops; a particular favourite is a vest top from Whistles. The vest is patterned with bold red and fuschia prints – in a psychedelic vortex of superimposed flowers and butterflies which swirl into and over each other, dizzying and disorienting the viewer on seeing it. Such a dramatic top is reminiscent of her former clubbing days, yet now she combines it with white trousers for a more understated look.

The clothing she now wears is more continuous, even incorporating some of her 'clubbing' items, within new assemblages. The last 10 years of her life constitutes not a clearly delineated rupture, but gradual shifts within her broader life trajectory. The biographical shift from being a single girl having fun and going clubbing to a married home owner, and being slightly more settled, does not involve any aesthetic rupture. Hemlines are lower, tops are adorned with less glitter, and translucent clothing is

replaced by opaque. She still purchases new items that are exuberant, yet teams them with her more staid designer pieces. She recently purchased a new denim mini-skirt from Miss Sixty, slightly A-line, with a chunky belt that is attached to it. Rosie wears it with a black fitted shirt, and brown knee high boots, rather than with a see-through or cropped top, as she may previously have done. Her vivacity is enabled through facets of her outfits, whilst still allowing her to adapt to her new lifestyle. Adaptations in her clothing enables her to negotiate a transition in her lifestyle, a shifting continuity, wherein she still wears clothes she feels fit her own aesthetic preferences yet are more suited to a settled married woman. In her youth she participated in a series of defined fashions, whereas more recently her sartorial continuity is enabled through adopting clothing of the past and reintegrating in into her more sensible clothing.

She is able to recombine such items as they coincide with the fact that she now has a clear sense of her self, and as such has the confidence to attempt to express and externalise her self through clothing. The instances where clothing is kept relate clearly to notions of success. When women throw out clothing, often it is when they are trying to discard that part of themselves. The process of forgetting is also a conscious act (Forty, 1999). In spite of such attempts, these examples make clear that, as clothing is worn everyday, vivid memories keep resurfacing. Whilst Rosie related her teenage examples of embarrassing moments, and therefore failure, Theresa and Mumtaz have clothing that remind them of their former successes. Even when such clothing is no longer worn, or even a current facet of themselves, keeping the clothing involves a recognition that this is someone you used to be, and therefore have the capacity to be this person. The memory is

maintained and preserved. With Theresa's work clothing, she loves the items, yet no longer has the life-style to wear them; she does not want to abandon the sense that she used to be this successful working woman. Whilst 'former' items may be recombined, many items cannot be reworn: often as such items come before the woman 'becomes' her self. Many biographies through clothing have a pivotal point; yet this does not signify that after this point uncertainties, failures and ambivalences are no longer present, as will be evidenced in the next chapter.

Clothing as constitutive of the biographical self:

Running throughout this chapter is an understanding of the particular material ways in which clothing externalises biography: through revoking the sensual experiences of wearing, holding the body of the wearer, through the rips and tears which characterise habitual wearing or the items which are rarely worn, and hang as mementoes in the wardrobe. However, clearly many items are thrown away and as such, the wardrobe does not offer a comprehensive biography through clothing. Belk notes similarly that a photo-album is not an accurate 'reflection of life' (Belk, 1995). The point that emerges from this data is that clothing is not a 'reflection' of a pre-existing life; Belk's quote seems to imply that there is somehow 'a biography' which exists prior to and independent of externalisations and representations. Rather clothing, verbal narratives, photographs and many other means are all various forms of externalised biography. Clothing is not a representation of life-styles, but rather what emerges from my data is that clothing is fundamental to and constitutive of both the person and biography – it is not a secondary representation. The previous section showed Rosie's memories of being explicitly

constituted through clothing, and the possibility that she is still being so. The example to be considered here shows clearly how clothing may be directly constitutive of the person.

Emanuela lives in Nottingham with her husband and 11 year old daughter; she terminated her career as a teacher to complete an MA in textiles last year. Three years ago she received a diagnosis of breast cancer, for which a partial mastectomy was necessary. Understandably devastated by the news, she managed to muster the strength and emotional control to emerge from the operation with a stable outlook. However the radiotherapy that followed was to prove more distressing. Emanuela entered a period of depression, the radiotherapy draining her of any vitality; she spent most of her days listlessly moping around her house, watching daytime TV, with no impetus or drive for activity. A friend of Emanuela's who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer 25 years ago, advised her of a diet she herself followed that helped her to get through this period. In tandem with the radiotherapy Emanuela went on this extremely strict macrobiotic diet – no meat, coffee, tea, fats, sugars herbs or spices. Rather than plunge Emanuela deeper into the mire, this strict diet gave her surprising stores of vitality. The other effect of the new healthy regime was that Emanuela lost a great deal of weight. This period of time was one that was characterised by ambiguity: having just been diagnosed with cancer, having major surgery and suffering bouts of depression as a result of the radiotherapy. Yet at the same time she was brimming with new found vitality and had attained a new svelte physique, a period of optimistic pessimism.

A facet of her previous listlessness had been characterised by not taking proper care of her appearance, mooching around at home most days watching daytime TV, not even managing to keep the house in an orderly fashion. She felt she could not be bothered to engage in the usual rituals of getting ready. Her daughter used to comment despondently when Emanuela did go out that she had not brushed her hair again. Understandably her family were concerned, and on one of her trips home in an attempt to instil some of her previous vivacity, her father took her clothes shopping. Despite usually relishing such an opportunity she was unable to muster any enthusiasm and ended up trying clothes on to placate her father. One item her father coerced her to try on was a greenish grey trouser suit. Contrary to her own expectations she loved the shape of it; the trousers are fitted and slightly flared at the bottom. The jacket is the part she likes the most, it is single breasted and the buttons are at waist height, so when they are done up an hour glass silhouette is achieved. Her lacklustre trying on of the item was confounded by the flattering shape on her body. She saw her new body size outlined to perfection in the changing room mirrors. The new item enabled this vision, rather than making her feel drained by colourless sloppy clothing.

She loves the combination of it being both smart and comfortable. It is still her favourite outfit. When she first tried it on it transformed her, as she was forced to develop a self-conscious awareness of the image she saw before her. She tries it on on the occasion of first interview with me, even now when she tries it on in front of the mirror it has the same effect. Once her dad saw her in it, and the optimism it had invigorated, he bought it for her and a massive shopping spree ensued. In retrospect Emanuela realises what a

change this made to her life. Wearing the suit made “me feel good about myself for the first time in a long time”; this shopping spree marked something of a transition in her wardrobe. From this moment, she decided that she was going to start making an effort with her appearance everyday, wearing her favourite clothes all the time – not only on special occasions. She mobilised the capacity of certain items to transform her, through wearing them everyday. This enacts a change in Emanuela’s life: gone were the listless days of hanging around at home, she found a new lust for life. The shift in clothing along with body and health changes meant that Emanuela looked better than she had in years. Previously she had suffered from anaemia and insomnia, with her medical misfortune culminating in the breast cancer. With her new diet she only needed 5 hours of sleep a night, was incredibly slim and buzzing with life. Her clothing routines and regimes forced into her new rituals. A combination of seeing a more positive image in the mirror, and of forcing herself to undergo the various daily beauty routines, meant that she could be bothered to go out, tidy the house.

As her father’s purchases forces her to enter into the socialised life of clothing, she returned to her full existence as a social being. It is clothing here that activates a biographical shift for her, rather than being a secondary effect of a ‘real’ or prior change. By undergoing daily rituals of beautification she was making herself to participate in life again, and ordinary daily routines. Forcing herself to go through these processes daily was, in alliance with her new diet, the catalyst for her renewed vitality. In tandem with buying these new, smarter items, she started buying colourful clothing again, as someone pointed out to her that she tended to wear darker clothing. For a vast period of time she

had not really reflected on her wardrobe, but rather through a continuous period of working at the Buddhist centre and being a mother, she ended up in something of a sartorial rut. Clothing here is agentic, as she buys brighter clothing, anticipating that it will lift her mood and enable her to participate in life again. Here clothing is a catalyst for a shift in her self and biography. The shifts in her clothing choices precede any 'actual' biographical shifts and can therefore be seen to be foundational in reconstituting herself biographically.

The ambivalence and uncertainty about her body, health and appearance were channelled into a positive transition in her clothing; Emanuela was able to move from being depressed and listless to enthusiastic and vital. The clothing enabled her to go out, to participate in the social world. The sartorial shifts that this period engendered are ones that Emanuela still tries to consciously cultivate. There are times when she feels herself slipping into old patterns of wearing scruffier clothing, or not being bothered day in and day out. Yet she makes a conscious effort to buy colourful clothing, or smarter clothing as she knows it makes her feel better. Now in her wardrobe there is less of a division between day wear and night wear. The smarter clothing that she loves she wears all the time – she refuses to relegate her days to being those where she doesn't care. Emanuela is constantly battling against her former self and former wardrobe as she utilises the transformatory potential of clothing.

Conclusion:

The ways in which clothing manages to enact a transformation in Emanuela forms a clear challenge to the notion that clothing merely 'reflects' a pre-existing life. One of the key tenets of material culture studies is that objects do not passively reflect cultural categories, but rather through their very materiality enable and impact upon the construction of such categories. What emerges from my fieldwork similarly is that items of clothing may be fundamental catalysts in precipitating such changes. The notion of 'retail therapy' is widely recognized and indeed practiced in contemporary Britain, as shopping is a means of mood enhancement, or as an instigator for a 'new me', usually subsequent to a relationship break-down. Indeed I found the practice to be quite widespread within my informants; however this takes on a primary significance in this instance. The clothing forces Emanuela to consider her newly acquired body shape, and her reflected image, as it propels her into the next life-stage. The daily rituals that are involved in appearance management have to be engaged in: brushing and hair styling, skin regimes and make-up, selection of suitable outfits and accessories. Emanuela becomes part of these daily rituals and activities which inhere within the socialised life of clothing. The clothing is not only important as a moment of transformation, but carries on being important every day; she becomes vitalised, socialised and activated by these processes, and becomes able to go out more, and re-enter her social life.

Implicit in this example is that through managing her clothing she is in fact taking hold of her life; she is aware of clothing's capacity to transform and uses it to keep herself from relapsing into her former self. This sense of a person being able to take control of

biography through clothing is one which emerges from other examples in this chapter. The notion of ordering the past and the manipulation of biography that was found in the example of Theresa's wardrobe, in many ways resonates with Giddens's discussion (1991) of the self as a reflexive project. Through ordering and sorting out her wardrobe, she is able to construct her biography in accordance with her current life-point. Indeed it follows the linear trajectory posited by both Giddens's and almost all other writings on biography. However, despite this, it is apparent that this is particular to clothing – the ways in which clothing may be ordered and manipulated is extremely different from words. Indeed the ways in which memory and biography may be managed through material culture in general, differs greatly from when it exists in intangible form, in the mind. As Hoskins (1998) demonstrates, when objects form an extension of the self, or embody particular memories, people are able to consider themselves in the objects before them, and as such understand and order their biography through such exterior forms. Similarly with photographs, as the photograph forms a moment of fixity (Berger, 1997: 293), this helps establish a hold on the past. The photographs fix a moment in time (Clarke, 1997); these moments are ordered, kept or discarded, in the process of a person considering personal narratives through the photographs. So too with clothing, women are able to look at the clothing in the wardrobe and consider their former selves and memories and in this process take control and manipulate this biography through throwing items away.

There are many similarities to the ways in which objects may materialize memory, yet it is important to consider the particular ways in which clothing does this. Given the

amount of clothing that most women possess, it is evident that the strategies and means through which this is possible are multiple. Clothing acquires its significance in biographical terms through having been worn; when such items are worn often, the clothing and the wearer become fused: understandings of Theresa's work self become inseparable from these items which were worn daily. In keeping the items, Theresa is able to re-envision herself as constituted through the clothing as her former self. This process of re-imagining herself in the clothing involves the sensual experiences of wearing clothing. Memories are held in clothing not through just looking at the item, but also through touching the item, feeling the fabric. Phenomenologically wearers are then able to resituate themselves temporally, able to re-feel this former moment. This is in many ways analogous to the hearing of a song on the radio which repositions the listener as the person they used to be when they used to listen to the song. This is possible through hearing, yet in the wearing of clothing it happens through the sense of touch; the synaesthetic process of remembering then draws in corresponding sensual experiences.

Another aspect of this sensuality is way in which clothing ages with the wearer, seen in the rips and tears and the fabric which has worn away. The life-cycle of clothing, which has its own inherent aging temporality, means that the relationship between clothing and memory is complex. In the cases of items that are worn continuously though changes in the life course, this is only possible as long as the clothing itself does not die. In the instance of Vivienne's fleece, the item has reached the end of its own life-cycle long before she has ceased wanting to wear it. Her desire to wear it continuously is thwarted, and the item, contrary to her desires, hangs no longer worn, frozen through its own

incipient demise. Here the rips and tears however are valued in showing a general process of aging, not the specificity of memories, nor of periods of her life. In other instances the rips, and material processes of change are valued through the fact that they individualise. Theresa's pregnant dress is kept as it exemplifies the symbiotic relationship of her body and the dress, through presencing the absent body. Items of clothing are kept in many instances as they concretise the memories and give permanence to what may well be a passing moment or an ephemeral period of life.

Emerging from all these facets of the ways clothing externalizes biography is that it acquires meaning through being worn, in constituting former selves, and materializing memories through the sensual experiences of wearing. Whilst many items remain as mementoes, and, like photographs, privilege the isolated moment (Clarke, 1997), many other items will be worn again. It is as a result of such potential recombinations that a biography through clothing forms such a challenge to linear notions of biography, and as such a new way of thinking about temporality is necessary. One of the major characteristics of conventional narrative biography is that the past and biography exist as a sequence, in chronological order. However through recombining former items, various moments from the past are all co-present; all moments are made temporarily present through the act of dressing. Memory is constituted through the temporary juxtaposition of pasts. It is not about trying to reanimate a former self in a direct fashion, even if in many instances it may be a conscious attempt to ensure that the 'past' is not terminated. Wearing outfits of both old and new items, manages to presence past moments, and

attributes of the self in the complex constitution of an outfit. This enables a temporary recognition that the wearer is constituted through diverse former trajectories.

Such re-combinations may be part of the broader project of taking control of personalized memory, as wearers are able to remind themselves through which routes they have been constituted. Equally such combinations may be entirely accidental as decisions over what to wear often centre upon what items 'go' together. However, within the items in the active wardrobe may be items from decades ago, yet in the moment of selection they are present primarily as an aesthetic form. In bringing together an outfit, based on domain or aesthetics the former temporalities and biographies of the items are invoked unintentionally, as items are put together aesthetically. By virtue of being in the wardrobe many items keep getting reactivated.

This is apparent in the ways in which the wardrobe is organized. None of the women I worked with ordered their wardrobe chronologically. Ordinarily, the active clothing, as the last chapter made clear, is ordered in terms of function or aesthetic qualities. So, when women select clothing to wear, whether they are consciously selecting something they used to wear, or making solely aesthetic decisions, they are not looking at their wardrobe as a chronology. Rather, from the array of clothing displayed before them, the 'past' items form part of the continuum of the wardrobe. Therefore the temporality of the wardrobe is not one of linear coherence, but rather the various pasts moments punctuate the arrays of clothing, as they are temporarily conjoined with other moments in the act of dressing. As many choices and orderings are done aesthetically, it is apparent that the

temporal and aesthetic orders overlap, and it is the personal aesthetics of wardrobes which will form the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Looking Good: Feeling Right – Aesthetics of the Self.

The emphasis in the previous chapter on the materially particular ways in which clothing externalises biography, forms part of the overall orientation of this thesis as a study in material culture. It aims to redress the post-Barthian emphasis on semiotic decoding that has dominated accounts of Western fashion and clothing, and discards material objects in favour of the images of fashion. As such, structuralist approaches are problematic in positioning clothing as a text with arbitrary signifiers (Barthes, 1985). However, given that clothing is based upon assemblage, this focus upon relations between items remains particularly pertinent. The principle aim of this chapter is to reconcile the structuralist emphases upon the totality of clothing as a relational structure of meaning, with an exploration of the particular materialities of clothing. This is accomplished through investigating how clothes from women's wardrobes in London are put together as outfits which come to constitute a personal aesthetic. This aesthetic emerges as perceptions of what 'goes together', based upon colour, texture, style, cut, pattern. Rather than merely explaining the details of such an aesthetic, in the manner of costume history, what 'goes together' is taken in terms of what 'feels right'. As material culture, clothing is not seen as simply reflecting given aspects of the self but, through its particular material propensities, is co-constitutive of facets such as identity, sexuality and social role. Thus, instead of assuming a predetermined self, the question here becomes that of determining what anthropological conceptualisation of the self would arise when viewed through the practice constituted by clothing.

The ways in which clothing is comprehended, are fundamentally linked in to wider understandings of the relationship between the surface and personhood. The Western ontology divides the inner intangible 'self' located deep within, from the frivolity and inconsequentiality of the surface (Napier, 1985, Wigley, 1995, Miller, 1994). Within popular and academic discourses, clothing and fashion are therein seen to be superficial and unimportant, as material objects situated at the periphery of the body. However accounts which suggest that appearances are both a possible domain for self-construction, yet as simultaneously difficult to interpret (Sennett, 1971, Peiss, 1996), suggest that a more comprehensive understanding of surface and appearance is necessary. Through an understanding of the intricate processes of layering items of clothing, and the combinations of colours and textures that are made (Young, 2001), the complex construction of the surface becomes apparent. Here I am investigating such processes of assembling clothing as part of the multifaceted surface - being the site where the self is constituted through both its internal and external relationships.

Gell's notion of a distributed personhood (1998:21), wherein selfhood is externalised and distributed in space through different material objects, is useful here. As a collection of items of clothing, the wardrobe can be seen as such an externalisation of selfhood. Gell (1998) refers to individual style (as opposed to generic artistic styles) as 'personhood in aesthetic form' (1998:157). In this instance, the personal aesthetic I will be interrogating is the palette from which women paint themselves daily. In dressing, the daily creation of such 'art works' becomes a medium through which their intentions are externalised into a form by which they can impact upon the will of others. Following Gell, the items of

clothing are not viewed as passive objects utilised by autonomous individuals, but rather are fundamental to the mediation and externalisation of agency. However, the emphasis that would follow a reading of Gell, would be on clothing as a medium through which women can successfully impact upon others. The ethnographic material to be presented here shows this is far too straightforward and uni-directional. Putting on clothing is a form by which one exposes one's 'self' to the outside world. The clothing becomes a conduit which allows other people's intentions to penetrate deeply into the intentions of the wearer. This often actually prevents the wearer of clothing from becoming the kind of self they would otherwise have wished to construct, let alone influence anyone else. As will be demonstrated, the result is very different from our usual assumption, as championed by post-modern accounts, that this would become simply a study of the self expressing itself freely through clothing.

Combinations of the self:

Through considering the material microscopics of particular women's personal aesthetic, the focus is upon how clothing mediates this relationship between the individual woman and the outside world. The assemblage of outfits involves negotiating whether an outfit is 'really me' and equally the expectations of the occasion of wearing, and the gaze of those present. The process of combining items to be worn involves the process of constructing the individual in the eyes of others. In tracing a 'personal' aesthetic, this does not entail a move from 'the social' to 'the individual', nor a disciplinary shift from anthropology to psychology or psychoanalysis. Rather the daily dilemma of assembling clothing involves the mediation of factors such as social normativity and expectations, as dressing involves

not only individual preferences but fundamental cultural competences (Entwistle, 2001, Craik, 1993, Goffman, 1971, Mauss, 1973). As clothing is worn next to the body, such 'external' factors cannot remain abstract but are necessarily bought within the realm of the intimate, experienced as an internal dilemma and ambivalence (Wilson, 1985).

One woman I worked with, Rosie, a married management consultant in her early 30s, was recently invited for the first time to dinner at The Ivy restaurant (a renowned haunt in London of the fashionable and famous), with four of her female friends. Greatly excited by the prospect of attending such an exclusive location, the issue of what to wear was one of grave consideration. In selecting her outfit she wanted to look as if she belonged at such a venue, as adequate for the occasion in the context of such famous fashionable people. Throughout her life Rosie has participated in a series of clearly defined subcultures – Goth, hippy, 'student', camp club culture, 'single girl on the pull'¹⁰ – persistently dressing to fit in with various established groups; such a desire to conform to the place and people that constitute The Ivy, can be seen to form part of Rosie's sartorial trajectory of adhering to categories of clothing. On this occasion her anxiety to fit in is exacerbated by the novelty of the occasion. As a highly-paid professional with no financial dependants, a house in Hampstead, her concern does not centre on her financial position. She certainly possesses an abundance of designer clothes that would appear to benefit the occasion.

However, she remains unsure of what to wear and spends the next few hours futilely trying on various items from her six wardrobes. In order for the unprecedented occasion

¹⁰ As discussed in more detail in the previous chapter.

of going to the Ivy to live up to its anticipated expectations, Rosie feels she needs to wear something new and dynamic. Overwhelmed by the mass of clothing, in a myriad of colours, patterns and styles, she is unable to differentiate between them and her usual capacity for aesthetic combination is lost. In this moment of panic she falls back on her favourite black leather knee length Maxmara skirt as a lifeline of security in the ever-expanding vortex of clothing that engulfs her room, piling up on the bed and floor. The fit of the skirt is perfect, clinging to the hips, gradually triangulating out, ceasing just below the knees. Despite being leather, the refined shape and style and its blackness give it an understated effect when worn with her usual black cotton cap-sleeved top. Viewing her wardrobe through the lens of the unprecedented invite, the vitality of her favourite outfit is drained. The sombre blackness fails to give voice to the ambiguous facets of her personality needed for the occasion: trendy, youthful, stylish yet also successful. Resolving to still wear the skirt, the search begins for a suitably “funky” yet fashionable top, as the increasing mounds of failed tops obscure her bedcovers.

The sheer mass of clothing leads her to panic, as she doubts whether a suitable top will ever be located. Finally, she resorts to another tried and trusted item, and opts to wear the skirt with her favourite one shoulder khaki look fitted top, which is dusted with silver glitter. The combination of khaki and glitter is unexpected: a casual combat look coexisting with the feminine and sexy. Khaki is ordinarily used by the army to stop the individual being noticed, whereas here the glitter, which catches the light as the contours of her body move in the light, enables the eye to ambiguously be drawn to her. In her panic Rosie ended up resorting to two items that she knows how to wear and knows are

‘her’ – fitting her usual aesthetic: one from the “funky” order of clothing thus enabling her exuberance, the other personifying chic stylishness – the skirt being made of luxuriant leather bought from an expensive boutique. To complete the outfit, she wears her knee high leather boots and a three quarter length leather coat. Seeing as both are the same fabric and colour as the skirt, the combination seems like a safe one – the shiny blackness should all blend and merge into one – leaving the top to stand out.

However the outfit was a failure. The leather skirt, jacket and boots, which Rosie thought would “go” instead of placing prominence on the funky top, served to dominate the outfit – undermining the ordinary subtle sexiness of the skirt. She said she felt like a member of Liberty X (a ‘raunchy’ popular music band renowned for a self conscious creation of an overtly sexualised style through the wearing of all-over leather). Rosie felt aware of her age in the outfit – being in her early 30s and having now adapted her ordinary aesthetic to her mature more settled position in life, it was “a bit glitzy and a bit too much like a young, clubbing girl for me”. The outfit harks back to her days as a younger woman ‘on the pull’ – inappropriate to the Ivy where there is a sense of having ‘arrived’. The crucial element in Rosie’s discomfort here lies not in the items themselves, but in the way in which the items were combined. She failed to anticipate the dominance of the shiny heavy blackness, which swamped the outfit eliminating all pretence at subtlety, and extricating different facets of her personality. Instead of looking chic, stylish and sophisticated, she felt overdressed and uncomfortable; the smooth structured contours of her skirt, concretised into a perpetual physical awareness of the heaviness of the leather oppressing her. As part of her ‘distributed personhood’ (Gell, 1998), the outfit should

have externalised her intentionality in order to impact upon those present into seeing her as a chic, fashionable individual. However here the agency of the clothing becomes apparent; Rosie failed to anticipate that the leather in the boots, the skirt and the coat would articulate together in such a way as to impede her own intentions and create unwanted effects.

The failure of the outfit also relates to the particularities of place. By opting for those garments that had become most unequivocally expressions of herself, ironically Rosie ended up neither looking nor feeling like herself. Because, by definition, a safe self could not create what needed to be an unprecedented self, where 'fit' had to include place as well as person. An aspect of the self here is therein anticipatory – seeing herself as who she could be at The Ivy – fashionable, chic, successful – refracted back onto her wardrobe. Rosie instead looks backwards to previous successful events; here the self is temporally not merely the succession and culmination of past events as is often assumed. Rather through clothing the self may be forward looking: an imagined potential self as seen through the eyes of others, projected backwards onto the clothing in the wardrobe.

Rosie's example is one of aesthetic disjuncture; however equally common amongst my informants were joyous moments when an outfit 'is me', when the combinations made constitute an aesthetic fit with the wearer. Mumtaz is a married mother of two in her mid-forties; she has lived extensively in Paris, Kenya, Uganda and India for the majority of her life. Her husband was made partner in a prestigious law firm in London four years ago, which was the impetus for their move from Paris to London, where they now live

with Mumtaz's parents and their own two children. Last year she was invited back to a wedding in France of one of her husband's former colleagues. The decision over what to wear incorporates the normative expectations of what is acceptable wear to a wedding. In addition she will be re-encountering friends after an absence of several years. Mumtaz confides that when living in Paris the significant investment women made in their appearance led to her own constant rigorous maintenance programme. Even a trip to pick up her children from school turned into an event wherein clothing had to be closely considered. Having been out of this cycle for a significant period, Mumtaz feels the imagined expectations of the others particularly keenly.

As someone who loves clothing and fashion Mumtaz rather than panicking relishes the opportunity to create an outfit afresh. Rather than purchasing anything new, she searches through her many wardrobes: three of which contain "Western clothing" the other one containing "Indian clothing". The final outfit she decides upon consists of a white linen short summer dress, with thin spaghetti straps, worn over her "ethnic" trousers – fitted black cotton trousers with colourful embroidery encircling her ankles (the trousers are in fact from *New Look* a standard UK chain with no particular Asian connection). To finish the outfit off, she draped one of her *chunis* (the scarf part of one of her many shalwar kamiz) round her shoulders. The particular *chuni* is jade green with round embroidered sections which shimmer in the light (her "spotty scarf"). The monochrome effect of the dress and trousers is invigorated by the playful shimmering of the *chuni* and the embroidery that surrounds and defines her ankles. Mumtaz has drawn on her pre-existing

wardrobe yet has made a unique combination: wearing a dress over trousers, mixing her Indian and her Western clothing.

On this occasion the outfit was a considerable success, she spent the afternoon basking in the admiring glances and comments of her friends. Not only did she manage to conform to the social mores, yet she managed to look chic, stylish and most importantly individual – she looked and felt ‘like herself’. What Mumtaz is combining here is not just colours and fabrics; she is also combining in aspects of her self: former parts of her biography – her life in India, her global existence, bringing together the diverse items within one outfit. The ‘surface’ of her body here is the site for the construction and presentation of her self, constituted biographically and relationally. Strathern (1979) writing on self-decoration in Mount Hagen in Melanesia, demonstrates that for the people of that region appearance is regarded as anything but superficial. Focusing explicitly upon body decorations employed by men on formal ritual occasions, Strathern points out that such elaborate make-up is not a form of disguise, but rather this is seen to be where the self is displayed – ‘bringing things outside’ (Strathern, 1979: 249). Although the context considered in my ethnography is vastly different, an analogous process can be seen to be happening. The different facets of Mumtaz’s self – her past, her ethnicity, her global travels – are objectified in the clothing hanging in her wardrobe. In the act of dressing, she hangs her self around her body, bringing attributes of her personality and aspects of her self into the surface of her outfit. Others will regard her work of selection as an expression of her intent, which thereby makes visible to them things which on other occasions may remain private and concealed.

In this moment of selection Mumtaz is able to draw together disparate threads from her four separate wardrobes. Rather than expressing recidivist tendencies like Rosie – going for ‘safe’, Mumtaz makes a novel, bold combination. Such eclectic assemblage is something Mumtaz does frequently, befitting the multiple facets of her self. Furthermore eclecticism is a defining feature of fashion, the fortuitous consequence of her diverse combinations lead to her outfits appearing fashionable and original. The self is here backwards looking – through considerations of her previous experiences of dressing in France, and through her past sartorial biography. Yet simultaneously Mumtaz’s imaginary projection of herself in the eyes of others at the wedding, successfully refracts back on her wardrobe to lead to the unprecedented assemblage. Like Rosie on the actual occasion of wearing the clothes – in this case the wedding – wearing her self round her body, she is exposed to the judgements of others; the adulation she receives reinforces her sartorial confidence, vindicating her decision.

Vivienne’s wardrobe:

Rosie and Mumtaz reveal instances of aesthetic disjuncture and aesthetic ‘fit’ respectively; the moment of assemblage incorporates the particular anxieties and concerns engendered by significant social occasions. However, the example to be considered next centres on a delineation of an entire personal aesthetic, from which emerges specific moments of actualisation. Whilst for both Rosie and Mumtaz, their clothing is fundamental to their self-conception, Vivienne, a retired political researcher in her 50s, appears to be the opposite. Politically aware and motivated she insists that her

appearance – clothing and otherwise – is not fundamental to her beliefs or values. The real important self is ‘inner’ intangible and invisible. She professes to have no interest in fashion, despises shopping, and states she just “throws on whatever” everyday from her one and only wardrobe. She relates with relish instances wherein her work colleagues roll their eyes in despair at the sight of her in ripped jeans and fraying old sweaters. It has become so important to demonstrate that clothing does not matter to her, she now actively cultivates the unkempt look of the ‘unlooked’. Vivienne’s paradox is that, so fixed is her idea of wanting to not be judged by appearance, that in fact she has to consciously cultivate such a ‘natural’ un-thought look. Vivienne wears such clothing with the intention of convincing others that she does not care about her appearance - the outcome being, that she in fact cares a great deal what others think of her appearance.

Her sole wardrobe contains her skirts, shirts and dresses. Piled at the top are various jumpers and fleeces, with many of her pairs of shoes rammed at the bottom. Her only other receptacle for clothing being her chest of drawers, containing: her underwear, Yoga clothing, winter jumpers, and t-shirt tops. Now retired, she partakes only in the odd free-lance political research. Even during her full time working days, as there was no dress code, Vivienne does not have separate work/casual clothing. The clothing she wears is continuous across the different domains of her life: whether she is going in to work, having dinner with a friend, seeing one of her daughters or spending time at home. The styles, fabrics and colours tend to cohere around particular configurations, defined by her own aesthetic. The main points of disjuncture from this are clothing worn to weddings, travelling – where the external influences of social, cultural and religious expectations

come into play. However, even in these cases in order for her to feel 'comfortable', Vivienne's dominant aesthetic widens to incorporate such events. The notion of 'comfort' incorporates both a physical sensation of comfort, yet also in a more nuanced sense, comfort involves the notion of aesthetic fit: the wearing of clothes which are 'you'.

Vivienne articulates comfort as linked to practicality and eschews any notion that she has a defined aesthetic where 'how I look' links in to 'how I feel'. Claiming she makes no effort with what she wears, actually what emerges from an analysis of her wardrobe is that in fact the 'natural', thrown together look involves a great deal of cultural work and cultivation. Ordinarily Vivienne wears her Rohan trousers and perhaps a sweater in the day in the winter time; she asserts that the trousers are "comfortable and practical", being loose, navy blue, cotton trousers. Large combat style pockets protrude on either side of the hips; such bulky evident pockets, allied with the multiple toggles and zips that cover the trousers, create an aesthetic of functionality. Not only are the trousers practical – being of a hardy fabric, loose with large pockets - they are also designed to look functional. Vivienne was given them by her niece who used them during her gap year. Although initially she only wore them in the garden, she now wears them all the time, much to the dismay of her daughters, and niece who complains "they don't do anything for you!" Vivienne evidently revels in this response to her clothing, as she actively creates an image of herself as being purely practical, with no interest in the combinations of her clothing. However, central to the creation of this image is the appearance of the trousers to others; the anticipated effect of the trousers is to make others think she has

made no effort; the incredulity of her niece makes apparent the efficacy of the trousers as an objectification of this intention.

Vivienne's clothing falls primarily into 3 colour domains: dulled down colours (black, navy and grey), 'earthy' colours (stone, olive green, browns) and 'warm' colours (red, burgundy, yellows). Although such colour palettes do not solely correspond to certain events or domains, Vivienne does express a tendency to favour the brighter, lighter colours in the summer months. Rather than being an isolated preference, the dominance of darker, duller clothing throughout Britain in the winter months is overwhelming. In tandem with the practicalities pertaining to the weather (darker colours absorbing heat and therefore being inappropriate to the summer; lighter colours becoming ruined in rain and bad weather) is an overwhelming sense of social appropriateness. Such a normative expectation is manifest in the colours available in retail outlets; many women I interviewed divided her wardrobe primarily into winter and summer clothing – many having a biannual switch of wardrobes in around May and September¹¹. In effect Vivienne is part of a broader trend wherein the clothing practices and shifts in colours, fabrics, wearing of open toed shoes in effect creates the seasons (given that the division between summer and winter is characterised more by unpredictability than by binary weather polarities). Here there is a semiotic 'fit' to the outer environment; just like in Rosie's case, where clothing is selected to be appropriate to the occasion and the people she will be meeting, here the 'sunny clothes' are worn to greet the anticipated sun. Comfort here involves the fit to external factors rather than internal.

¹¹ The exception to this being the fashion-forward innovative dressers (discussed in chapter 7, for whom there was little distinction, with the emphasis instead being upon the layering of clothing.

The ways in which Vivienne wears colours are quite particular: in strong contrasting blocks. Such contrasts are made either through combination, or are often co-present within one item of clothing. This is evident in her long flowing cotton Afghan dress which was mentioned in chapter 3, as something she has worn persistently throughout her life. The predominant colour of the top half is a burgundy colour with defined green, burgundy and blue rectangles printed on. The bottom half is backed by a striking arterial red colour, and terminates at the ankles with strong bands of burgundy and navy. Rather than being colours which merge into each other, the harsh blocks of colour stand in stark juxtaposition, challenging the viewer. Although she no longer wears this dress (given the political connotations of wearing a dress which is evidently Afghan) she loves the colours, patterns and style of it. Seemingly in contrast to the uncompromising boldness of the colours, the fabric itself is soft, worn cotton, falling in loose flowing waves around the body. This stylistic paradox is central to Vivienne's aesthetic, as will become apparent.

Another facet of this aesthetic paradox is that whilst the colours exist in strong blocks, Vivienne's penchant for habitually wearing the same items of clothing for periods often in excess of 20 years leads to a softening of the material, and fading of the colours. The top shown on the photograph below epitomises this characteristic of Vivienne's wardrobe.



Photo 5: Vivienne's worn 'sunshine' top

This top was given to her when she was 16 by her then actor boyfriend; it was purchased in Nigeria. During summer, when the weather turns slightly cooler she always wears this top because “it is the colour of sunshine. It cheers me up so much to wear it”. On wearing the top her mood is lifted by the brighter colours, and the coolness of the weather is balanced out by the sunshine of her top. Having worn the top frequently in the summer for the last 35 years, the fabric has softened to the touch, and the colours faded through exposure to light, and persistent washing. The orange colour has become diluted. Vivienne has had similar sartorial preferences all her life – a practice which is confirmed

by the presence of numerous tops she has had for over 30 years. The seeming contradiction of the harsh blocks of bold colours, on the soft, faded worn fabric is symptomatic of her wardrobe. Furthermore such continuity of styles is evidenced in the sartorial coherence of her wardrobe.

Assembling aesthetics:

As Rosie's example makes apparent, the ways in which combinations are made are crucial in realising a particular aesthetic. Despite Vivienne claiming she will 'throw on whatever', and that she has no concern with what colours go together, there are certain combinations that are always made. She possesses 3 red shirts in total, and each one is only ever worn with black trousers or a skirt. All of Vivienne's skirts are floor length, with a slit running right up the back of the skirt, ceasing half way up the thigh. When she walks the trailing leg is almost entirely exposed. This facilitates ease of movement, yet simultaneously Vivienne confesses she likes exhibiting her legs. Her daughters Sandra and Tamsin regularly buy her skirts with a slit, insisting this is her best bodily feature. Whilst being appropriate for a woman of her years and status, the outfit is practical in not impeding her bodily movements, yet at the same time is sexualised. As regards the colours, not only is the contrasting effect of red and black quite striking, but also the combinational potential of the shirts is severely limited. Although the red shirt and black skirt were not bought as an outfit, they only find communion with each other. Vivienne feels that neither item 'goes' with anything else. McCracken (1988) points to the need to understand the complementarity of goods; Vivienne's sense of 'what goes' is based upon her particular sense of order. The internal categorisation of the wardrobe along such lines

is common to all wardrobes investigated in my fieldwork. Vivienne's example here shows that this sense of 'what goes' can be extremely constraining. The colours – black and red, and the styles – a loose shirt and a skirt – articulate with each other in such a way that she feels she cannot intervene. What she feels to be the logic of the clothing means that she will only combine these items together.

In this instance it is both the colours and the styles of the items that are restrictive; more generally throughout Vivienne's wardrobe the stylistic combination of a loose, relatively unstructured shirt with a long skirt is a common one for Vivienne. She has an array of silk shirts: one purple one, which hangs alone on a hangar, and a collection of 4 all hung together: in the following colours: camel, olive green, pale brown and a darker brown shirt (a couple of these are shown on the photograph on the next page). They were acquired explicitly for travelling, in keeping with local cultural and religious sensibilities, predominantly within the Middle East, where she recently carried out political research on Islam. In Iran, given the extreme heat, she wore flimsy cotton summer dresses beneath the obligatory long coat which concealed the body. However in Pakistan and Egypt, she borrowed a couple of pairs of raw silk trousers off a friend, which she wore with her silk shirts: clothing that was comfortable, yet would not draw attention to her. Here the 'fit' is functional, as part of her job the clothing has to coincide with Muslim sensibilities.

These shirts are also now her standard wear for when she is compelled to dress more formally. Although Vivienne's clothes are relatively continuous across domains, slight moderations are made for formal wear. A particular combination she favours is her long

grey skirt, with one of her green-ish shirts and her fitted grey woolen waistcoat, from Monsoon. The waistcoat, and the shirts are shown on the photographs below.



Photo 6: Vivienne's silk shirts



Photo 7: Vivienne's waistcoat

The thickness of the waistcoat's material, and rigid seaming, serves to structure and formalise the waistcoat – designating its appropriateness for smarter occasions. Yet, the embroidery upon it serves to soften this effect. Vivienne admits that she loves to wear an olive green shirt with this waistcoat in part due the coordination between the green embroidery and the selected shirt. This outfit recapitulates the ambiguity at the heart of Vivienne's aesthetic hinted at earlier: the fluidity of the draping shirt and skirt coupled with the rigidified structure of the waistcoat, which is further softened by intricate floral embroidery.

This outfit is not only appropriate to formal occasions, yet simultaneously is one in which Vivienne feels comfortable; the 'comfort' is enabled by the ease of movement, and by being a particular look which Vivienne habitually wears. This issue of comfort is crucial to understanding Vivienne's wardrobe. She is in possession of a range of poncho style tops, all purchased about 15 years ago from a South American shop in Camden Town (North London). The authenticity of the items, being made in South America, from llama wool, is important to Vivienne in her self-conceptualisation as a global, politically astute person. Only one of them is an actual poncho (wherein the head goes through a neck slit at the top, and the material falls like a cape over the shoulders, leaving the arms free). Two of the others follow the principle of a pashmina (a large strip of material which is flung around the shoulders like a shawl). However the commonality lies in the fabric and patterning, and similarly in the effect and function of wearing them. She tends to wear all of them in autumn winter time; made from llama wool they are rough to the touch, and are worn over her usual clothes for an extra layer of warmth. Being impractical in the rain (merely getting sodden and waterlogged) she favours them on dry winter days, and often doubles them up as a rug in the park.



Photo 8: Vivienne's poncho

The poncho shown above is a favourite of Vivienne's, and to be discussed here is the ways in which a sense of comfort is engendered through the item. Crucial to this is the directions in which the stripes run; on the front part of the body the stripes run vertically, yet as the material slopes over the shoulders, so too do the stripes. As a result the stripes curve with the arms, becoming diagonal and gradually horizontal as they reach her lower arms. As the neck is a wide v-neck, in conjunction with the softening of the shoulders

through gently curving stripes, the effect is to make the neck area expansive, and the overall look is unstructured. The shape of the body is softened, rounding off the shoulders, physically engendering a sense of casualness. When worn, particularly on winter evenings in at home when there's a chill in the air, the masses of woollen fabric ensowathe and enclose her body – still allowing the free movement of her arms. The cosiness of the poncho is further facilitated as she is able to hug her own body with her liberated arms, whilst still being subsumed by a layer of fabric. Similarly the other poncho style tops permit such a sense of comfort and of being surrounded in cosy warm layers of fabric. The pashmina style items are thrown around the shoulders, thus enveloping the body when worn. This sense of the voluminousness of fabric, and looseness is prevalent in a great deal of Vivienne's clothing. As already mentioned the silk shirts she wears are wide and baggy, as are the other shirts she wears informally. Her primary concern is to remain unfettered and unrestrained by the clothing she wears; the clothing she selects enables movement, allowing this feeling of comfort, as the clothing embraces her clothed body.

The ponchos materially enable comfort and cosiness, in particular in the home (where Vivienne often wears them). The 'comfort' engendered is not merely an obvious physical sense (in particular given that the material is harsh), but rather as something which coincides with her ordinary aesthetic. The ponchos are wrapped round the body; as 'ethnic' clothing, authentically obtained, in the autumnal colours she favours – the ponchos therein 'fit' her self conceptualisation. Woven within the ponchos is her sense of the global, her political awareness. The looseness of the fabric is crucial; even in her

more formalised items, already discussed, rigidified structured shapes are not those Vivienne favours. The relationship between structured formality, as required by an evening/smart event, and soft fluidity is encapsulated in her skirt, silk shirt, and waistcoat combination already discussed. Here, through appropriate combination, Vivienne is able to feel appropriately smart, and aware of the formality of the occasion through the rigidity of the waistcoat.

Yet she is simultaneously allowed her usual 'comfort' through the flowing shirt in her usual blocks of colour. The fact that it is silk, a sensation apparent as it sensuously caresses the skin, makes it again defined as a smart or special occasion. Sexuality is heightened through the slit in the skirt, her legs are suggestively revealed only when she walks. The physical style of the skirt, through the slit, allows both the practicalities yet also, through taking a healthy stride a glimpse of the leg is revealed, and the skirt is elevated beyond the level of mere function. Both factors are equally important to Vivienne. Within this look it is not merely that each individual item allows distinct facets, rather it is within the surface of individual items (the shape of the waistcoat yet covered with delicate ornament) that this happens. Comfort involves a combination of not only particular colours, and fabrics, also within the surface of each item is a complex interplay: the complexities of the items ambiguously contradict and enhance each other. Part of what is being combined are aspects of her self and biography, cultivated through this aesthetic. Such an outfit shows the complexities of the surface through clothing as different items are layered upon each other to differential effect. Furthermore within each item the nuances and subtle antagonisms – of function and sexuality – interact and

interchange with each other within the feature of a single item of clothing. Also players in this interchange are aspects of her biography, of her personality. Strathern's (1979) discussion of the ways in which attributes of the person are brought to the surface has resonance here. With the movement of Vivienne's leg to a different angle, attributes of her self may be activated, then temporarily submerged, only to resurface again.

One of the most striking factors about Vivienne's clothing is the means through which she acquired it. The vast majority has been passed up to her by her two daughters – items they no longer wear or want yet which are not yet completely threadbare, often things which are already second hand. Many of her items are faded through perennial washing and wearing. Like the orange top discussed earlier, along with many items procured from charity shops, the biography of many items in her wardrobe is already extended over a long period of time, testing the durability of fabrics to their limit. Until clothing has physically disintegrated, Vivienne perseveres in wearing it. In wearing her clothing Vivienne is bringing her familial relationships, her political orientations, her ecological moralities all within the act of dressing. Combinations of clothing involve a moment of totalisation: of incorporating the diverse threads of her life within her clothing. Given that Vivienne's aesthetic is relatively coherent and continuous, the aesthetic totality that constitutes her wardrobe is able to bring together multiple facets of her self – as constituted biographically, relationally, politically and ethically. Like Mumtaz, what she is combining is not just colours, and fabrics, but fragments of her self.

Such an aesthetic totality only crystallises over time, as the clothing softens through wearing, so too the clothing becomes integral to being a part of her. In wearing the same clothes over a period of time, the fabric starts to relax. The persistent washing and wearing of a sweater starts to drain the colour, softening both the appearance and the texture. Through perpetually wearing the same items of clothing it is as if they age with the wearer, becoming like a second skin. On wearing them there is no awareness of constraint, or a seam that rubs or chafes, rather the items soften in the places where the body is most harsh on the clothing: the elbows of a jumper, or the knees on trousers. The relationship between the clothing and person becomes symbiotic, the hardness of the body being softened by the fabric. Having occupied such a relationship to clothing all her life, Vivienne loves to not have to feel conscious in the clothing she is wearing. When the clothing is already worn and aged, the boundary that separates the clothing and the person starts to disintegrate, and the clothing is able to 'become' the wearer. Bayly (1989) has pointed to the links between biography and clothing, wherein the porosity of cloth, as something worn by individuals next to the body, enables a fusion between person and clothing. Through clothing's capacity to age, yet being similarly durable, this symbiotic relationship between person and clothing is created – where the wearer feels comfortable in her clothing. What Vivienne makes apparent is that she is equally able to do this when someone else has worn the clothing in for her.

Isolated nodules of clothing:

Given that she no longer works full-time, Vivienne is able to wear such clothing all the time. However, as has already been suggested when discussing her more formal wear,

even when she has to dress more formally, she widens her ordinary aesthetic to accommodate external sartorial expectations. Within her wardrobe Vivienne does possess certain isolated 'outfits', compelled by particular social occasions. Despite despising wearing rigidified formal clothing, on the occasion of her brother's wedding, her anticipated potential discomfort is subsumed by familial relationships. The purchased outfit consists of a cream top and burnt umber coloured skirt, both made of cotton which shimmers slightly in the light. The top is short sleeved and hangs loosely, yet at the bottom where it is at its fullest the top is layered with asymmetrical jagged fabrics. The natural undulations of a loose top are enhanced by the extra layer of material present at the bottom. The skirt is in exactly the same style – and falls to near the floor. When wearing such an item the body of the wearer recedes in prominence and rather more the overlapping waves of fabric dominate and become the focus of attention. Moreover the body is still able to move freely underneath, albeit with the material swishing and catching against the legs with every step. Vivienne has worn this outfit to 2 weddings and would probably wear it to another, as she felt sufficiently comfortable in it, although professes she would not wear it to any other occasion as she would feel too "self conscious" in it, "over the top". Although such a domain forms a distinct nodule of her wardrobe, it is apparent that it still corresponds to her particular personal aesthetic: the colours, and the style. She wore something in which she was comfortable yet still conformed to the external event, and the expectations of those attending.

Whilst she only wears these relatively formalized outfits for particular occasions, she still feels comfortable in them, as they are incorporated within her personal aesthetic.

Vivienne's wardrobe constitutes an aesthetic totality in the convergence not only on particular colour combinations, but in her incorporating into her clothing her family, and her global political orientations. So tyrannical is this aesthetic totality that more often than not Vivienne turns down invitations to formal events if she is not able to wear her everyday clothes. She turned down an invitation to a very prestigious media awards ceremony last year, solely on the basis that she did not want to get dressed up. She hated the thought that she would be forced to walk in a "mincing way", wearing shoes she would be unable to take a full stride in, "I just wouldn't be able to be!" On this occasion Vivienne vividly imagines the discomfort she would feel at the event, and is able to opt not to attend. The way in which she moves and stands is fundamental to her 'being', and is enabled and facilitated by the clothing she wears. Despite professing to throw "whatever" clothing on, here an entire decision to not attend an important event is based upon clothing, and the 'discomfort' the wearing of formalised clothing would entail for her.

Conclusion:

The very fact that Vivienne turns down prestigious invitations based upon her refusal to wear certain clothes, makes it clear that clothing is just as significant to her as it is to the explicitly clothes conscious Rosie or Mumtaz. For all 3 women their wardrobes have been analysed as forms of extended personhood – wherein clothing becomes a means through which disparate facets of their selfhood are objectified (Gell, 1998). Gell's theory points to the ways in which a person's intentionality may be distributed through objects, thus highlighting the immense potential to influence the minds of others through a

particular medium. Such actualized potential is seen in Vivienne's cultivated image of a lack of cultivation, resulting in the despondent groans of her daughters. However what becomes apparent through closer analysis of all three cases is that 'how I look or feel' turns out to be anything but a personal and free expression of the self. One of the supposed characteristics of post-modernity is that 'everyone can be anybody' (cited in Featherstone, 1991), which translates sartorially into the wealth of often contradictory styles and identities to experiment with. What the examples here make clear is that there are numerous constraints which prevent this free exertion of agency through clothing.

The first constraint comes at the moment of assemblage: the individual has to commit to a particular outfit, combinations which in turn are unequivocally associated with that person. On any particular occasion one cannot be all the possibilities or looks that are present in the wardrobe. Although a degree of ambiguity can be incorporated within one outfit, the multiple identities offered by fragmented and ephemeral fashions cannot all be co-present within the one assemblage. Rosie's many wardrobes are overburdened with post-modern possibilities – offers of identities or selves Rosie may try on. Though for others who are aware of her affluence in clothing this makes her selection that much more specific, they know how easily she could have chosen something else. In the case presented in this paper rather than this abundance of choice leading to greater freedom, it is this very profusion of clothing that leads to her inability to choose and indeed in the end making what seemed like a 'safe' choice, but was in fact unsuited to the occasion. What is constraining here for Rosie is the fact that in the moment of dressing she has to perform an act of aesthetic totalisation to create her self. In Vivienne's case the opposite

appears to be going on – her entire wardrobe constitutes a totalized aesthetic, rather than this merely being required at the moment of dressing. Such a totality incorporates not only particular colour domains and softening, flowing fabrics, but incorporates all aspects of her existence - an aesthetic ‘comfort’ materially cultivated through a lifetime of wearing. However, what becomes apparent is that such a complete aesthetic coherence can be just as constraining as Rosie’s multiple possibilities. So enclosed are her aesthetic parameters that she is unable to attend events where she cannot wear these clothes.

Vivienne’s personal aesthetic is extremely restricted in terms of what colours and fabrics she will wear, this leads on to the second major area of constraint, which is the constraints of the clothing itself – in terms of both its material propensities and also its own internal logic of combinations. In positing the agentic capacities of objects, Gell (1998) critiques the assumption that autonomous human agents have intentions, which are imposed upon passive objects. Instead agency emerges in the context of a web of objects and people – and that ‘agents thus ‘are’ and do not merely ‘use’ artefacts’ (1998: 21). Through this he refers to objects as secondary agents – they are not therefore seen to have independent intentions of their own but rather are the material embodiment of this intentionality – part of the matrix of its generation and actualisation. Implicit within this argument, that objects are part of the externalized mind which may impact upon the mind of others – is the potential for failure. As the objects carry people’s intentionality, yet in Gell’s own argument are not passive – then through the materiality itself objects may thwart our intentions. This is clearly apparent in Rosie’s case. She intended to look chic and sophisticated, whilst each individual item in itself had worked before, she failed to

anticipate that through combination an entirely unwanted effect would be produced. The particular fabric from which the skirt was made – leather – sits heavily upon her. Throughout the whole night she cannot ignore its presence; the combination of three items that were all black and all leather lead to an unexpected consequence. In communion with each other, they come to dominate Rosie herself, and the subtlety of her top. Thus not only does the clothing not act as a medium for her own intentions, it produces quite the opposite effect, through its own material efficacy.

Rosie's example shows both the constraints of the material propensities of clothing, and the internal combinational logic of clothing. All women I have worked with have a clear sense of what can and cannot be combined together – in terms of colours, or styles or fabrics. Vivienne has an evident tendency towards wearing silk shirts and loose cotton skirts. Stylistically the looseness of the shirt and skirt correspond to create an overall feeling of fluidity; the skirt is in a 'safe' colour (blue or black) which has a high combinational potential. Again it is the shirt that is of the different fabric –the outfit is both smart and 'special' – through the shirt, yet the skirt grounds this in a comfortable everyday aesthetic. The style, colour, fabric all articulate together to create a particular effect. More often than not however this sense of what 'goes' is extremely constraining. What women experience as an aesthetic logic inherent in the style of the clothes itself can considerably impede their sense that they are free to choose.

As already noted Vivienne's clothing constitutes an aesthetic totality which in itself prevents her from attending an event as her clothing delimits her. Cultivated throughout

her lifetime, the dominance within her clothing of items that are soft and worn is overwhelming. As she has worn the clothing over such a long period of time, she becomes inextricably interwoven with the item itself. She cannot have this relationship to newly purchased clothing, which impacts upon her purchasing patterns – if clothing is not handed up to her she often buys it from second hand shops – so it is already worn. This in itself creates its own logic of narrowing, in that she rarely buys new clothing. Furthermore, if her old worn clothing ‘is’ her, the differential relationship she would occupy to a new item means that one of her pre-existing soft worn items could not coexist in one outfit with a new item. When new items are purchased they form distinct nodules within the wardrobe (and are usually ‘smart’ items). Only once items are worn are they able to be combined again with older items. What is apparent here then, is that the aesthetic logic is not that the logic of the clothing is constraining Vivienne, but that she herself is part of this logic. It is the interactive process of Vivienne wearing the clothing that creates this aesthetic incompatibility between the new and old clothing.

The third aspect of constraint comes from the way the clothing interiorises the anticipated judgments of others. Discussed earlier was the possibility that clothing may be a means by which women are able to externalize their intentions in order to impact the will of others. In terms of Gell’s (1998: 96-153) theory, clothing opens up the person to wider layers of externalised, potentially distributed, mind. But this opening up has made them vulnerable to penetration by the anticipated gaze of others. In the moment of selecting an outfit, Rosie imagines this gaze so vividly that it rapidly turns into such immense anxiety. Not only is she not able to find an outfit, she ends up falling back on an assortment of

'safe' items. In imagining how she may impact upon those at the Ivy, she lets the anticipated judgments of others in. Here the clothing may be regarded as a conduit, which, in opening up the potential impact upon the minds of others, also allows the fierce judgments of others to strike deep within. In order to select the outfit that will make Rosie feel fashionable and chic, she has to envision the clientele that attend, how she might appear to them. The result is that Rosie's usual capacity for combination and selection of outfits is lost. Despite having seven wardrobes, Rosie's selection not only failed to express her, but from her perspective quite betrayed her, turning her into what she imagined others saw as aspects of herself she would never have wanted revealed at that time. In understanding such moments of anxiety, we need to examine how clothing, as a medium that relates surface to depth, is as much the fibres that conduct the judgments of others to the inside, as the intentions of the self to the outside.

In Rosie's case this moment wherein the judgments of others penetrate within leaves her vulnerable. However, such a moment can also be one of success. As Mumtaz makes apparent, in an equally important occasion, she is able to exert her own agency on her clothing. Rather than allowing the imagined opinions of others to impede her decisions, she is enabled to make a novel combination. Many of the constraints discussed earlier arise out of the material propensities of items of clothing, the perceived internal ordering of the wardrobe and the totalisation necessary in the act of selecting an outfit. However despite Mumtaz's wardrobe having clearly defined orders – such as a separate 'Indian' wardrobe from her 'Western' clothes – she is not confined by this aesthetic logic. She has the confidence to exert her own agency on the pre-existing ordering of her wardrobe, in

order to make new radical juxtapositions. The logics of clothing do not dominate her choices. There are many instances therefore of success, of the clothing distributing the wearer's mind to others, as well as the instances of failure. When Rosie wore the leather items together, through combination they come to dominate and ultimately quash her externalized intentionality. However, in Vivienne's case often the opposite is the case. Wearing the worn, softened clothing, which is losing its colour, or the Rohan trousers with the aesthetic of functionality, she is able to both feel like her 'self', yet simultaneously influence others into thinking she does not care about clothing.

Through these three contrasting examples we can see the agency of the wearer: in selecting an outfit and as objectified through the items of clothing to impact upon others. At the same time, the materiality of the clothing also brings about unwanted and unexpected effects. However, there is not a defined opposition between the agency of the wearer and that of the clothing; nor in each instance of dressing does the order of things come to dominate the order of people or vice versa. Rather, there is an intricate interaction between the two. In the earlier discussion of Vivienne, it becomes apparent that even what appears to be the structural logic of her wardrobe – the new clothing being incompatible with old favourites – is in fact more complex. As the clothing becomes worn through its relationship to her and her body, she cannot wear new clothing with this, as it is incompatible with the self that the worn clothing embodies. Therefore her self is part of, and in part created by, this aesthetic logic. This is extremely different from the situation with regard to either Rosie or Mumtaz, both of whom are deliberately attempting to create an outfit that will impact upon the will of others. However, for

Vivienne this aesthetic logic has become sedimented over time. As the clothes become more worn the effect is two-fold: the clothing externalises her intentionality more efficaciously (as the unkempt look is enhanced), and also her personal aesthetic becomes even more narrowed, delimiting further what cannot be combined. As she wears items habitually, over extended periods of time, she lacks the extreme self-consciousness that Mumtaz and Rosie express on instances of dressing. Instead, now, Vivienne's clothing draws out facets of her self and biography through its own logics independent of the wearer. The slit in the long skirt allows the 'surfacing' of Vivienne's sexuality yet also of her practicality and desire for mobility. The fluctuating processes of surfacing and re-surfacing of facets of the self are actualized within complex aesthetic dialogues which interweave the agency of the wearer and the logics that arise from the materiality of the clothing.

Chapter 5: Constructing the surface: getting dressed as the cultivation of the self.

The previous two chapters looked at the extent to which women 'see' themselves in the clothing already hanging in their wardrobes. However, as dressing is understood here as a creative act, 'the self' does not just pre-exist through the wardrobe, where women just chose an item that 'is me'. As women stand in front of the wardrobe, they have to create an assembled outfit from the array of items hanging on hangers or folded in piles in front of them. The focus of this chapter is to delineate the processes through which women create them 'selves' through the act of dressing. Miller's notion of objectification (1987), derived from Hegel, is useful here, in understanding how the self may be created processually through particular material media. For Hegel, the development of self consciousness as a process involves the self externalising itself in order to consider itself as an other. The resulting dissatisfaction with the self-as-other results in this externalisation being reintegrated through the creative act of sublation, as the self is therein changed. The self is therefore not pre-existing, but is rather created through this act of objectification.

This is applicable to the act of dressing, as women deliberate over whether an outfit is 'me'. When dressing, they are not only considering themselves in the items of clothing, they also consider themselves in an external form through their reflected image in different mirrors, through photographs, through the imagined eyes of others, and indeed through my eyes, as an often present observer of this moment. As such, this chapter focuses upon the whole trajectory of getting dressed, and all the moments this entails.

The question then becomes what are the various ways in which women consider themselves through different material media, and how do these momentary externalisations come together in the creation of the final dressed body. A successful outfit is one in which women manage to fuse themselves with the items of clothing. In moments of success, there is an aesthetic fit as the outfit becomes 'me', and forms a successful externalisation of the self. However, more often than not the trying on of multiple items and outfits involves women failing to become who they thought they could be, as dressing becomes a failed attempt to find themselves.

This potential for failure is even more accentuated when we consider that as women choose an outfit not only do they try to find one that is 'me', but also one which must also 'fit' place, occasion and the expectations of other people. As the act of wearing only happens once, unless women are wearing a 'uniform', very rarely can they merely put on a pre-existing self. As Rosie's example in the previous chapter demonstrated, even items that have worked in the past may work not again, depending upon social situation. As such, the act of dressing is not just an interior dialogue within the self, but is the point wherein women have to consider themselves as relational beings. A crucial way in which this happens is through the constructed gaze of others. The previous chapter showed that as the body is dressed, the 'outside' is let in, as women consider the opinions of others. Mead's discussion of the relationship between the 'I' and the 'me' (1982: 102) offers a way of conceptualising this. When the self sees itself as an object, as others would, it is the 'I' that perceives the 'me'. When women stand in front of the mirror, the 'I' is trying to imagine how others see 'me' as dressing involves the self as both the object of the

gaze, and as the observer. Mirrors form a crucial part of this reciprocity of seeing and being seen (Melchior-Bonnett, 2002: 5).

Seeing the self through the eyes of others has particular resonance for understanding the relationship between woman and appearance; the gaze is racialised (Hall, 1997, Mercer and Julien, 1994) and also gendered. The notion that women exist as objects of the male gaze is well documented, linked to the power relations inscribed within looking (Bonner et al, 1992). As women consider their reflection they have to survey themselves as an object of the male gaze (Berger, 1972, Mulvey, 1975). However, it is the contention of this chapter that 'the gaze' is not homogeneous, pre-existing, nor constant. If dressing is understood as a process, it becomes apparent that the gaze emerges, and is constructed dependent upon women, location and occasion. This is not to negate the potentially disempowering and objectifying capacities of subjecting the self to a dominant male gaze, but rather that this cannot be presumed. The extent to which women construct themselves for, and are constructed by, the various mediated 'gazes' has clear implications for the self they are able to construct. This raises the second major aim of this chapter: to understand what kind of self may be created through dressing in the cases of women who constitute themselves at the surface and for women who do not engage explicitly and self-reflexively with their reflected image.

Constructing Natural appearances:

The activities incorporated within the process of getting dressed vary massively dependent upon particular women, and indeed the occasions for which they are dressing.

For some women, dressing starts long before standing in front of the wardrobe, with imaginings of what they might wear as they lie in bed and then the extensive trying on of outfits, involving lengthy deliberations in front of the mirror, and the elicitation of the opinions of others. For other women it may involve picking up whatever clothing happens to be on the chair in their bedroom with only a brief glance at their reflection to check their zips are done up, and the clothes are unstained. Given the diversity of practices, in this chapter I will take two main case studies, one who cultivates the 'gaze' of others, Sadie, and the other who wishes to remain unnoticed, Louise, who uses the mirror only for a brief check of her appearance.

I will consider the implications that constructing the self at the surface have for the self, and the ways in which this may be disrupted by getting ready for special occasions. The focus of this thesis so far has primarily been clothing; as getting dressed involves dressing the body and the skin, I will also here look at the whole process: hair, jewellery and make-up and the ways in which the totality of appearance is created. It is therefore not only clothing that can be transformative, yet also through various processes women are able to transform their appearances through work on their bodies, skin and hair. Since the early 20th century the development of the mass cosmetics industry raised the possibility that beauty is something that can be 'achieved' by all women (Peiss, 1996: 323). As such, appearance is not given, rather there remains the possibility of the 'made-up face constituting that self' (Peiss, 1996: 323).

What is considered to be 'real' and 'natural' is in fact constructed. Writing on adornment amongst the Wahgi Highland Papua New Guinea, O'Hanlon notes that body, skin and appearance are not given, nor 'naturally obvious' (1989: 138), but are socially constructed. Whilst this is an extremely different context, the ideas are translatable to contemporary Britain where even the body is now seen as changeable and controllable, through plastic surgery, dieting or exercise. It becomes the locus of the expression of autonomy and individuality (Turner, 1984, Bordo, 1993), as the body and self are seen to be inextricably linked. Despite noting how the body and its surfaces may be constructed or worked upon, women I spoke to often adopted a rhetoric of authenticity referring to the 'real me'. What will be discussed in the following example of Sadie is that the 'authentic' is in fact part of her creative acts as she constructs how she 'actually' looks. She is not only assembling an outfit, but also is assembling her face.

Sadie is 19, currently lives with friends in North London and works in a high street retail outlet; on the occasion described here she is getting ready for a date with Warren, a man with whom she has a casual sexual relationship. The process described below takes over 3 hours, which is a standard time taken when getting ready for a social occasion. Even, on an ordinary morning before work, dressing (including a shower) takes about 1 ½ to 2 hours. She admits she would rather be late for work and fabricate elaborate excuses than go out without her make-up on. Her daily processes of self-aestheticisation are therefore fundamental to the self she constructs and presents. In her flat there are 2 mirrors in her bedroom, one of which is full length, with 2 more full length ones in the hallway outside, and a small square one in the bathroom. Walking through her small flat from her

bedroom to the bathroom, or kitchen, one is constantly faced with one's own image; there are few places in the flat where the reflected self is not also present. On this particular occasion Sadie has had the day off work; she showers at half past three, and emerges, hair washed, half an hour later. She twists her long, curly and unruly hair into a hair clip, as she selects some turquoise matching underwear to wear whilst she gets ready. Having been working fulltime all summer, and unable to afford a holiday, she is dismayed by the pallor of her legs; first moisturising her freshly shaved legs, her fake tan is applied, initially a pale brown colour, it darkens over the next few hours. Its application rapidly becomes a two woman job; with my help we rub the lotion into the back of the heels so there are no blotches or marks which betray the fakeness of the tan.

Sadie then starts the lengthy process of cultivating her hairstyle; if left alone, her hair spills in long waves down below her shoulders. However, today she wants to make her waving hair appear as if it falls into natural spiral curls. The last time she went out with Warren she wore it straight, so to test his preference for her hair type, she opts to wear it curly. She stands in front of the full length mirror in her room and rubs in the 'curl definition' mousse; then upturning her head, with her hair cascading down in front of her, she runs her fingers through her hair, scrunching it into curls. She is careful not to let her hair flick onto her legs, possibly leading to disastrous streaks, which would tell the tale not of olive skin ripened in the sun, but of a quick fix from a bottle. The onerous process of drying and styling her hair begins with the fringe. She dries the main body of her hair in individual sections. The dryer is held up at all times; it is quite large and heavy and requires considerable effort for the 20 minute period of drying her hair. Stopping briefly

for a break, she stands in front of the mirror, worried that her hair won't curl properly today. Resolving not to be conquered by her wayward locks, she intensifies her efforts and bends over almost double so that her hair hangs right down. She turns her hair diffuser upside down, as she compresses her hair within it. When her hair is finally dry, she is so exhausted she has to sit down briefly after the strain, and applies her deodorant.

As the effort to make her hair look naturally curly is so immense, she opts to finish the process later and as a diversion tries on her outfit. A few days previously she acquired some new clothes: a cream cord mini-skirt and a salmon-pink sleeveless vest top, which she knows Warren has yet to see. They are suitably 'casual' so as to look as if she has not made too much effort. Facing the mirror in her room, she tries the outfit on with her pink flip flops and turns to the side to see the profile view of the skirt. Peering over her shoulder, she tries to catch the image of her rear view in the mirror behind her. The view is unsatisfactory; as I am seated on her floor she bends right over me so I can see up the skirt: 'can you see my arse?' - worrying her g-string will be visible. The inadequacies of the mirror are resolved by the presence of a second person. My opinion becomes another reflection, to enable a totalising version of her clothed body. She takes off the bra she is wearing as the straps would show with the top and puts on her "ugly but functional" strapless bra. The underwear is today selected for the view from outside; unconcerned whether the bra is attractive in itself, she worries how the look works through the eyes of others, wanting a balanced body shape. Standing side-on in front of the mirror, she checks that her profile is rounded enough and not disturbed by the underwear. She turns around in front of the mirror to examine it from every angle, her eyes constantly focused

on the mirror, to decide whether the look is better with the bra or not. Here one specific facet of her reflection is being considered: objectifying her chest area through her gaze. Symptomatic of the whole act of dressing, she is looking not at her reflection to consider 'is this me', but rather is seeing herself in fragments.

Now she is dressed and has done the preliminary stages of her hair styling, the next stage in the laborious tasks of beauty is her skin. She stands pressed against the full length mirror in her bedroom with a tissue to squeeze her spots "it's amazing how you have to go through something so hideous to look so beautiful". In order to do it in the ordinary lighting of her room, she has to press right up close to the mirror, looking at the micro-details of her skin. Her view of herself here is microscopic, not even just a body part but fixated on her pores as she tries to cultivate a naturally looking radiant, blemish free complexion. Again pressing her body against the mirror, she embarks upon tweezing her eyebrows. Her eyebrow is pulled right up into an arch with one hand, liberating the other hand to pluck out the hairs. This daily ritual has become crucial, as her eyebrows are naturally bushy; "it just shows nature isn't always right!!" Her aim is to create the impression of a naturally appearing arched shape, which frames her eyes. Both the micro-rituals of the skin and the eyebrows focus on the microscopic yet are ultimately directed towards how others will grasp the overall effect of the face. By engaging in such processes, with the eye focused upon the pores, or errant eyebrows, she has in mind the overall 'natural' radiance of her skin. Therefore the act of dressing involves seeing the multiple constituent parts, which come together in the final look. Thus far in the process of dressing, she has been carrying out her 'usual' activities; as she has carried out these

micro-rituals so many times, there are no moments of great reflection, doubt or changing of her mind. There is still a constant interaction in dressing between the micro-rituals carried out on her pores, and standing back to consider the whole effect, to see the context of her face considering how she will be seen as she temporarily distances herself from her reflection.

Her face is now cleansed and moisturized in preparation for make up; in keeping with the aesthetic of natural beauty to which she aspires, the tones she has opted for are natural ones. Starting with her eyes, she paints a peachy colour over the upper eyelid to “awaken my eyes”. In even swirls she delicately brushes a white shadow on from beneath her eyebrow, down to meet the peach shades, so they blend together seamlessly, aiming to make her eyes look vitalized. She applies an orange eye-shadow, in a curved line which follows the lower side of the bone which forms the eye socket; the line is thinner on the inside of the eye, gradually widening towards the outside. It is then blended in as a boundary between the two other colours. When the eyes are open the orange shade is the most visible beneath the lightening effect of the white, making the eyes appear wider and longer. All selected colours are from the same palette, being similar tones, blended in subtly together. Prior to moving to London, Sadie carried out a one year foundation course in art at university. Disillusioned by their emphasis on conceptual art, she decided not to pursue it. The legacy of her days as an artist hangs on her bedroom wall: a painting of a large rose painted in pink and red hues, on a yellow background achieved by a gradual building up of layers of tones from the inner petals of the rose outwards. The major manifestation of her creativity now is in her laborious processes of self

aestheticisation. Her eye-lids are the canvas on which she builds up and blends the colours. Even in this instance where she is cultivating the illusion of a completely natural look, beautification involves extensive aesthetic procedures, and a constant battle against unruly eyebrows and hair. The creation of 'nature' becomes who she is, her 'self' as a work of art. From the pores in her skin and the ringlets of hair outwards, the surface of her body becomes the aesthetic medium for the cultivation of her self.

Despite going for the natural look she opts, in contrast, to make more of a feature of her eyes, putting on extensive mascara. She brushes her upper lashes upwards with, in excess of 20, rhythmical strokes, applying more on the outer eye-lid. To do this she tilts her head backwards and opens her eyes wide. After a brief respite she puts on the second coat of mascara "I like lashes to be nice and big to match my hair". She then stands back a few steps in order to gain perspective, and looks at her eyes from a distance and in the context of her whole face. She leans in and reapplies and then moves back to re-examine herself. The final stage in makeup is her foundation, blended onto her chin, nose area, cheeks and under her eyes. She puts on her cheek gloss from the Body Shop along the cheekbone, and blends it in gently; aiming for a dewy, glowing complexion, she stands back and tilts her head to see how her cheeks catch the light. For Sadie, the process of getting ready starts with her hair, and the pores of the skin, and its texture, scent, makeup. In doing her hair, eyebrows and her pores, she is creating the canvas upon which she prepares her makeup.

She now returns to her hair to sort out her fringe. In the hallway she assembles the ironing board in front of the full length mirror and plugs in the iron, turning on the fairy lights which frame the mirror in the hallway, and twinkle around her reflected image. Her hair straighteners have broken, and unable to afford any new ones, the perilous ritual of ironing her hair is now part of her daily rigmarole. She applies her hair straightening serum, loving the exquisite smell that is unleashed every time she moves her head. She then gets on her knees in front of the ironing board, and brushes her hair onto it. Placing a piece of plain paper on top, she irons over both the paper and her hair. "This is where I burn myself!" she exclaims. She used to iron not only her fringe but her entire hair every day; marks where the iron has scolded her blemish her hands and face: battle wounds in her incessant struggle with her untameable waves of hair. She then stands up and brushes the fringe. The process is repeated three times until finally she stands up and takes a step back to look in the mirror, and decides to trim her fringe. She goes back to her bedroom and stands a few metres back from the mirror in that room, ruffling her hair. Most of the activities she carries out in front of the mirror happen through micro-fragments: the hairs of her fringe, or the shape of her eyebrows. Yet this happens in conjunction with the stepping back to consider her whole reflection. Through this process of distancing she is able to consider her hair in the context of her overall look. Now dressed and made-up, she puts on her silver jewellery: a heart necklace, 2 butterfly necklaces and her giant hoop earrings. She then puts her perfume on her wrists and sprays it in front of her and walks into it so that the scent clings to her as she moves. The perfume is enhanced by the delicate, feminine fragrances that are liberated when she puts her scented body glitter on; it is applied with a velvet pillow that caresses the skin, and is brushed all over her arms

and legs. She checks her reflection one last time in her mirror, satisfied with what she sees, the elaborate process of getting ready is finally finished, and she is ready to go out.

What is striking in this example is the amount of time and effort that go into looking as if she has not spent much time on her appearance. She is not attempting to make herself look different, nor to look as if she is wearing much make-up. On this occasion as Warren has never seen her without her make-up, what becomes important is not a pre-existing 'natural' face, but rather the 'nature' that she cultivates. This in turn has implications for the self that she is constructing; rather than her appearance being incidental to who she is, these processes of self-aestheticisation are crucial to her self-conception. Therefore neither her appearance, nor the self this encodes can be seen to pre-exist these processes. As Goffman (1974) points out, there is no pre-existing reality of the self or social roles, but rather through cultural expectations, and learned repertoires of behaviour, we 'perform' roles and social persona. For Sadie as these processes are carried out so often, the cultivated becomes the real and natural.

For Goffman, not only are roles performed, all of everyday life is a 'performance' and as such the self has to be enacted (1971a); when people state that "she wasn't acting like herself" not only does this indicate that we have a sense of an integral authentic self, yet also that this 'self' does not exist prior to behaviour and interaction, but that who you 'really are' is evidenced, or failed to be, through appropriate behaviour. For Goffman this involves living up to the conception the individual has of themselves, an 'idealised' (1971a: 34) self you believe you can be. Sadie has in her mind, as she dresses, the final

appearance which is who she 'really' is. However, throughout the act of dressing she does not regularly survey who whole reflection, but rather this is dispersed through objectified body parts, eyebrows and the curls of her hair. The squeezings and tweezings within the micro-surface of the skin, in alliance with the application of makeup, are geared towards the overall look of natural beauty. She is able to see her self in fragments in the mirror, as the images are fleeting, she has no need to dwell on the body parts, but rather sees them as constituent parts in the overall idealised image of herself. She rarely steps back to consider the totality of her reflection pre-make-up, as such an uncultivated image would form an aesthetic disjuncture. At the final point of getting ready, she pauses on her total reflection which coincides with the image of herself; her success at carrying out this activity everyday increases confidence in her own capacities as the idealised image is constantly reinforced.

The primary emergent usage of the mirrors since the Renaissance centres upon the 'self's dialogue with itself' (Melchior-Bonnett, 2002: 145); however, one's gaze upon the self is also the 'confirmation of the gaze of others' (2002: 145). Dressing in front of the mirror is a relational act, seen in Sadie's case in part her considerations centre upon how Warren will see her. This issue of the gaze forms the focus of the next section.

The gaze:

The gendered nature of 'the gaze' is well-documented, arising in particular out of Mulvey's discussion of Hollywood films (1975), which she argues are produced from a male viewpoint. If women exist only as the object of the male gaze, this leaves the

problematic question of how women can position themselves as viewers if the dominant gaze is alleged to be male, and whether women can only be viewers of themselves in a surrogate male position, in effect objectifying themselves. Although this was discussed first in relation to cinema, it is applicable to a full gamut of cultural representations, such as television, advertising and pornography, and as such raises wider issues of representation. In his discussion of the painting *Las Meninas*, by Velasquez, Foucault (1970) concludes that in order to make sense of the painting, the viewer has to subject themselves to the discursive meanings of the painting's in order to complete its meaning. Such a position, where the subject is only able to create meaning from within the regime of truth, would imply that women are only able to valorise their appearance through a male gaze which objectifies them.

However, Hall has pointed out that such potentially objectifying gazes may be disrupted, citing the example of 'Black is Beautiful' (1997) where previously denigrated black beauty becomes a domain of empowerment, as the terms of valorisation are reversed. King has also pointed to the fact that there is never only one gaze, that there could be a 'democracy' of gazes (King, 1992) with multiple ways of looking. As Foucault himself points out in the discussion of *Las Meninas*, within the painting there are multiple gazes, and layers of representation: 'the gaze, the palette and brush, the canvas innocent of signs...the painting, the reflection, the real man...' (1970: 11). So too in the act of dressing, there are many different points when different gazes and layers of representation emerge. Applying Mead's theory of the relational self (1982) to dressing, a crucial aspect of considering an outfit is seeing yourself as others see you. In this case

being objectified through the imagined opinions of others is not necessarily disempowering or 'objectifying' in the negative sense Mulvey and subsequent writers imply. The nature of the gaze is dependent upon the context of looking: in the bedroom, in a shop window and the occasion for which women are dressing. In the example described above, Sadie is dressing for date with a man, and as such he is considered throughout. However, the gaze is always multiple, shifting and contested: through her own eyes, her eyes, the remembered opinions of other people or indeed it may be a generic male gaze.

I will consider the generic male gaze first, as Sadie is someone who has always been explicitly positioned as the object of the male gaze. She has lived in London for a year now. In her time in Manchester she had multiple jobs, mostly retail jobs, and also worked in a beauty salon and as a hostess in a bar. The latter job she acquired when she was just 18, in a bar which was also a renowned celebrity haunt. A couple of men worked as cocktail waiters behind the bar, otherwise the staff are attractive young women, all dressed in black. Irrespective of the qualifications of the female employees, they are rarely situated behind the bar, the manager stating that he wanted them "out where everyone can see you". On popping in one afternoon to meet the manager, Sadie's 'interview' consisted of a few cursory questions about what jobs she had done previously, all the while she tells me she felt his physical assessment of her as he looked her up and down. Despite never having worked in a bar, and having no experience of mixing cocktails, she was employed in that instant, with the manager's leaving remark "you know how good we expect you to look don't you?"

Sadie's usual outfit was her fitted black trousers, and a wrap-over black top, low enough to reveal the red lace on her bra as it peeped out the top. She was soon promoted to being a 'hostess', which entailed chatting to the businessmen and other rich male customers there whilst they consumed their drinks. Such a job positioned Sadie as the object of the male gaze: placed standing by the bar to lure rich men in, to be looked at and lusted over, being compelled to flirt with men she admits in a normal situation she would not wish to know, but as it was her job she had no choice. In fact not only since then but prior to that, she has always solicited the gaze of others in such a way, finding that having male admirers is a vindication of her attractiveness. She has therefore been positioned explicitly as the object of the gaze, and consensually now enters into it. There is however a clear point of ambivalence. She wants men to find her attractive, to be the object of their gaze, yet she is similarly forced into it, often by older unattractive men. In dressing for that job she has to consider this objectified male gaze, to 'continually survey herself' (Edholm, 1992: 155) through this imagined gaze. At this time, this was part of her job, yet even now she still admits to wanting men to find her attractive. Therefore this 'gaze' does become internalised; this is not to argue that she is therefore by definition oppressed by it, as it may be a source of self-confidence, and indeed intersects with other ways of seeing herself as 'seen'.

In the first example, Sadie is getting ready to see a specific man; however, even if she was going out with another man or a friend, she would still carry out the same processes of getting ready. It is not just his eyes she sees herself through, but it is also how she sees

herself. Mead's assertion that the 'I' sees the 'me', through the experiences of interacting with others and remembered reactions, is inadequate. In this instance Sadie's gaze and self-regard have become autonomous as she is cultivating a relationship to herself. Given that she is in her bedroom for hours every time before she goes out, her own gaze becomes crucial as she pampers her body and skin, as part of her own admiring gaze. The gaze she has internalised in this instance has become her own, as it is separated from the leery men who used to gaze at her. It is almost as if the man himself is an excuse to get ready in this fashion, as she herself concedes on the occasion of another date "it's nice to have an excuse to spend ages getting ready".

This act of getting ready takes place in her bedroom, and the ways in which the gaze shifts with context will be discussed later. First, I will take an opposite example of a woman who does not want to be noticed or 'seen'. Sadie is extreme in her degrees of self engagement; however this does not signify that women who spend less time are therefore appearing as they 'really' are. As Goffman points out (1974) all of everyday reality is an enactment, part of which is the performance of appearance. For many women, the mirror is not a crucial part of dressing. Women may perform a cursory glance in it before going out in order to check that their labels are not poking out, but there is no cultivated relationship to the reflected self. Louise, a student in Nottingham, is a case in point. Each morning she has a shower, and brushes and briefly styles her hair in front of the mirror. She examines her skin for blemishes; if any are encountered she attempts a swift cover-up with her make-up concealer. Her clothing is selected next; on opening her wardrobe, the first thing she does is go to the pile of 10 pairs of jeans at the bottom and, as she is

rarely seen in anything else, she selects a pair. She then peruses the tops hanging in the wardrobe, and on most occasions ends up wearing one of her many black long sleeved ones. On leaving her flat, she checks her appearance in the mirror briefly.

Louise's daily act of dressing, as it is for most women, is routinised, consisting of selections which she does not reflect on extensively but are made in a similar manner most days. Her aim on looking in the mirror is to verify that there is nothing out of the ordinary in her appearance. She actively seeks to avoid being noticed, or the focus of attention. The gaze of herself is therefore not important; she wants to appear socially acceptable, to measure her appearance in relation to social norms, yet in doing so not to attract the unwanted attention of others. Louise and Sadie are extremely different: Sadie invites the gaze, Louise shuns it. But there are commonalities: both women get ready in a similar fashion almost every day. As such, even the extremely elaborate rituals carried out by Sadie are relatively habitual and routine, even in the instances of going out there is no great occasion for panic.

However, this ordinary relationship can be easily disrupted by a particular occasion. On one occasion when I go to see Louise in Nottingham, it is her friend's birthday barbeque in a weeks time, and will be the first time she has seen many of her friends since graduating the previous year. As she attempts to select an outfit, she stands before her wardrobe and is faced with an overwhelming dominance of blacks, blues and greys, as she flicks through the clothes. Her friends always comment that she wears the same sorts of clothing and she is dying to buy something new. She is still doing her MA, with no

real source of income so cannot afford it. Her paucity of new exciting clothing is exacerbated by her friends' relative affluence. The girl whose birthday it is works for Paul Smith, another works at Whistles, and many of the others have a similar penchant for designer clothing, and the requisite money to fund such a preference. "It's so unfair" she wails, wishing she could afford to buy something new. The clothes she does have appear to her as alien objects, unrecognizable. She can no longer remember what it is that she used to wear. She panics as even her trusty black top and trousers appear boring to her now, dreary and uninteresting. In that moment it becomes inconceivable that these items of clothing could ever have been so reliable; the imagination of what her friends might be wearing drains the vitality out of her wardrobe and she yearns for something new. Haunted by images of Calvin Klein dresses, and ensembles from Paul Smith, her clothing comes to appear an inadequate alien entity; the clothing is fine when it is out of focus, but when the spot-light is on it, it appears inadequate and undeserving of attention. She imagines the fashionable, expensive clothing that her friends will be attired in, relegating her own clothing to drab anonymity.

She cannot believe there is only a week to go. A few days later, she is galvanized into action when one of her friends texts her to inform Louise she's wearing a mini-skirt and pleads with her to likewise wear one. Although apprehensive as she has not worn one for a while, she has no other real ideas so has a root around in her wardrobe, trying on various skirts and reluctantly decides on an outfit, a black mini-skirt and relatively new black vest top. She tries to imagine herself at the party; yet the reflection that faces her is not the one she can envision receiving admiration. Deep down she knows she is not going

to wear her selected ensemble. The next day she is having a despondent wander around Nottingham city centre on the way to college, and spots a girl on the street wearing some cropped denim jeans. In a contemporary fashion, they are fitted, three quarter length and gathered slightly at the bottom. She knew they were from Top Shop, as Louise already had some full length jeans that looked similar. She couldn't get the jeans out of her mind: they were suitably 'safe' for her to wear, being jeans, yet were also quite fashionable and represented a slight disjuncture from her usual style. There was no alternative: on the Saturday of the Barbeque she went into Top Shop in the morning and bought them. She couldn't afford them, so had to open up a store card, using her parents' address.

Louise's dilemma in front of the wardrobe is a common one: being faced with a collection of clothing that appears alien, from which it is impossible to recognize the outfits that she so loves, always wears and looks good in. With this specific event the way she looks at her wardrobe is changed, her gaze is refracted through the imagined gaze of her friends. The wardrobe is only alien and inadequate for this moment; the collection of clothing is faced at a distance, it is no longer just un-thought about habitual clothing that enables her to blend in. Most of the time her wardrobe appears sufficient and positive in terms of her identification through her clothes, but it is this event that has re-configured her wardrobe as alien so she cannot even recall her normal relationship. The implication of this example is that wardrobes settle into routine, relatively unconscious selections which become comfortable, until they are disrupted by an event which matters and which casts a woman in a relatively inferior light. The degree to which this happens differs among women. For Louise the failure of her wardrobe is only momentary, as she

imagines her clothes as they would appear in front of her friends. In order to perform or enact a role successfully, Goffman asserts that the individual has to have an idealised image of the self they can be, and to believe in the social situation that they have the 'attributes you appear to possess' (1971a: 28). However, Louise sees herself in the outfit and imagines how she would look to others; under this imagined gaze she is unable to believe in herself as being the fashionable, trendy person she wishes to project. All of this happens before the actual event, 'back-stage' rather than 'front-stage' (Goffman, 1971b) and she has to buy something new out of fear of shaming her self. The imagined projections and fears of her own inadequacies make her vulnerable.

Consequences for the self:

The extent to which women construct themselves at the surface has clear consequences for the self. One of the ways through which this happens is through 'the gaze', which does not exist as an abstract constant, but rather emerges through the anticipation of specific situations. For Sadie this means that she has internalised being the object of a gaze. For Louise, her relatively routine ordinary relationship to her clothing, does not make her visible, yet the anticipated occasion of the party positions her and her clothing under the spotlight – leading to a vulnerability in her clothed self. In Sadie's case, having been positioned as the object of a gaze, the internalised gaze comes to be autonomous, and her own admiration acquires a self-sufficiency in the hours spent in the bedroom. When she stands in her bedroom looking at herself in the mirrors, her own admiring gaze is essential to how she constructs her self and in creating her own confidence. As she does it all the time, the hours of cultivation becomes the reality of her appearance; whilst

she may feel robust under her own admiring gaze in the bedroom, this makes her more subject to the opinions of others when she ceases to do it. In the last few months, as part of a broader shift towards a healthier lifestyle, Sadie has joined a gym, and now goes every day after work for at least 2 hours a night. Eschewing carbohydrates as highly calorific and detrimental to weight loss, she is trying to follow a diet of protein, vegetables and salad. Although spending vast amounts of time focusing upon her physical appearance, the focus is rather the 'body beautiful' more than make-up or styled hair. Moments spent in front of the mirror are spent now examining the relative firmness of her abdominal muscles, and pertness of her bottom, rather than studying her face or hair. Moreover, as she goes to the gym straight after work, application of make-up is impractical given its propensity to run off the face with the rivulets of sweat, teased out during vigorous sessions on the running machine.

Sadie has been astounded by the number of comments she has been receiving from people in work, as they approach her to ask "what's happened?", "what's wrong?" When she replied she was fine, the standard response was "you just don't look like yourself". Such was the level of comments about how awful and peculiar she looked, in her break-time, rather than have a customary chat and drink with her friends, the time was spent in the toilet frantically applying makeup: mascara to return her eyes to their habitual prominence, and Touche Eclat (an under eye foundation stick which conceals dark circles and bags). Having not really noticed how her own face looked different prior to work, she was struck that as her work colleagues have never seen her without make-up, the 'natural' look that she spends so many hours cultivating daily, is believed by her friends

to be her 'actual' look. She finds herself trapped in a cycle where makeup is essential in order to continue looking like her self. Here the make-up, jewellery and clothes are not an external artifice but rather are the actuality of her appearance. As a result of her laborious daily self-constructions, the irony is that when she wears no make-up she cannot 'really' be herself.

This shows how the external perception of her friends forces her into re-engaging with her ordinary practices of self-cultivation, in order to look like herself. This also relates in to her own engagement with her reflected self. On a recent day off work, planning to spend the day shopping, and then meeting her friend to go to the gym, she selected her newly acquired sports wear to put on: marl grey Nike tracksuit bottoms, white trainers, a fitted white sports zipper top. As she would soon be in the gym once again she chose not to wear makeup nor style her hair. A brief cursory glance in one of her many mirrors before leaving the flat leads to her exclaiming in horror "oh my god, I look so different, I'm just not me!" This falls in stark contrast to her previous cultivations, where the process of 'objectification' (Miller, 1987) was complete; when she looked in the mirror there was an aesthetic 'fit', as her attempt to transform herself through clothing and make-up was successful in creating 'me'. On the occasion described here, had the look been successful, the potential self externalised in the clothing, a sporty healthy yet attractive person, would have become actual when the clothing was worn on her body. However, the outfit appears external and not 'me' at all, as she has failed to transform herself through the clothing. There is a discrepancy between the self she thought she was projecting and the reflection that faces her. In fact she confesses now that every time she

looks at her face in the mirror she cannot help but stare at her reflection trying to reconcile what she sees facing her with the self she has been cultivating all her life. When I quiz her on whether this could merely be a new era in her life, she says that she will go back to wearing full make-up again. This outing into town wearing her sports wear is the first time such clothing has not been confined to the gym. On the way there, she glances at her reflection in the bus windows, and cannot believe how “awful” she looks, setting her on a paranoid constant search for her appearance in every fleeting reflected image, trying to grasp the person she saw, as herself.

Her physical sense of disjuncture arises not only when she visually encounters herself in the mirror, but is also present in how she feels in her body. Ordinarily wearing lots of heavy silver jewellery, its absence makes her feel light and self aware. On one level she feels physically comfortable in the loose cotton fabrics, she feels an aesthetic discomfort as she constantly senses the absence of weight on her ears, or the feel of gloss on her lips. She no longer looks nor feels like ‘herself’. Now when she goes into work, she has returned to the tortuous rituals of make-up and hair styling. Even when going to the gym afterwards, she can no longer bear the comments from her friends. More importantly she doesn’t want them to adjust to her new image as being how she looks. She wants them to still believe the outside she cultivates is in fact her ‘true’ appearance. The difference in lifestyle, the image of being a sporty healthy person with a toned body is one she desires, yet equally the aesthetic this engendered was one which was in disjuncture with her sense of self. She used to be extremely familiar with her reflected image; now she is caught off guard as she no longer identifies with the image facing her, as if it is not her real

reflection. Over a period of time she has got into the habit of spending hours every day cultivating her image; in her bedroom, subject to her own admiring gaze she cultivates a relationship with her self. When she emerges into the world, and the actual gaze of other people, she is filled with utter confidence, projecting onto others her own admiring gaze. Sadie's paradox is that the self she has created is so robust through this constant and entrenched daily process of getting ready, in the same manner each day, that she is unable to change it without making her self vulnerable. In Sadie's case the very thing that makes her vulnerable is the opinions of others. Through attending the gym she is exploring new possibilities for her self, but as the cultivated, made-up self was so constant she is unable to explore the diverse possibilities of the self, which are not constructed through make-up. The possibilities are therefore delimited as the elaborately cultivated 'natural look' is the authenticity of her appearance here.

Sadie's self becomes vulnerable as she is externalised through the view of her friends, and then in her subsequent search for her image in every fleeting reflection which reinforces the gaze of her friends. This also raises the issue of context because even now she has returned to her old processes of getting ready she is able to return to being the object of her own admiring gaze. However, when she leaves the privacy of her bedroom, she cannot control the gaze and comments of everyone, as she walks past a building site and men shout comments, she has no control. Despite her anger at this, she is impotent. At various different moments, she may be objectified in both positive ways, yet also as a powerless object of leery builders. Some other women are able to control even this, as they travel from their homes to the place they are going out in a taxi or car. As such they

negate the spatial relations of the city which would force them to come into contact with such objectifying situations. Even such women cannot control the gaze of their friends or others when they are present, as Rosie's example in the previous chapter made apparent.

The 'authenticity' of photographs and mirrors:

There are various other tools women adopted to make themselves 'robust': utilising other external forms of the self such as photographs and mirrors. Often photos have a similar role attributed to them by women I interviewed as to mirrors, seen as being able to give some kind of 'objective' truth. Although, of course, the image that is presented is as partial as a mirror and yet often I encountered a tendency to make a photograph question or confirm opinions women had of an outfit. Often when I was carrying out a wardrobe interview, women would rush off to get photographs of the outfit worn for various events as evidence of how nice an outfit looks. Patsy has in her living room a photograph of herself wearing her fitted white ruffle shirt and denim skirt. There is no-one else on the photograph; she is delighted with it, as the shirt is cut short to reveal a tanned midriff. She has recently lost a stone in weight over the last year, and as a consequence feels she is able to wear such items again. The white shirt was a relatively recent acquisition; it is also a relatively fashionable item, and as such Patsy knows she will not be able to really wear it the next year as it will be 'out' of fashion. In keeping the photo she is able to hold onto this image of herself. Even if she puts on weight again, at least in having the photo she is able to hold on to her self as being that slim. Here the photo bolsters Patsy's self-image and as such is kept as it serves to permanise what may well have been a temporary externalization through the outfit.

However, Lydia, one of my Nottingham informants, provided me with an example of the opposite effect of a photograph. When going through her wardrobe one outfit she showed me was an outfit she wore to a wedding. The outfit consisted of a knee length black linen skirt, with a beaded array of flowers on the front bottom corner, a black vest top with spaghetti straps, along which there were slightly shimmery silver beaded detail and some black pointed slip on shoes, with a silver beaded detail on the toes. She had rushed out to buy the outfit a couple of days before the wedding, and thought it was relatively safe and elegant, being black. It also coordinated well, with the matching silver details. However after the wedding, when perusing the photos, she was disheartened to see that the outfit looked differently from what she had remembered. Although the skirt fitted well, and she loves to wear vest tops, she felt that the skirt made her look frumpy. She loves the skirt in itself, but somehow she felt that it looked wrong when she wore it.

On encountering her image on the photograph, she encountered a discrepancy between how she had felt she had looked and the image offered to her on the photograph. The photo revised and clarified how Lydia felt about the skirt and the outfit, as a depiction of how she 'really' looked. She hasn't thrown the skirt away as she still likes it, yet she cannot bring herself to wear it, disturbed as she was by the photo. The ephemeral moment of wearing, at the particular angle caught on the camera serves to permanise how she looked on that occasion. As such it seems to offer a totalizing vision of how she looked in the outfit. A mirror is often seen as fleeting, the specific reflection will never be re-encountered.

Despite this alleged ephemerality of the image in a mirror, such an image is often utilized as 'authenticating' in the same manner. In the earlier description of Sadie's lengthy rituals of getting ready, when she is assessing the appropriateness of the flip flops she puts on, in the context of her newly tanned legs, it is insufficient to merely look down at them. She stands in front of the mirror and contorts her foot round in various angles so she is able to see her foot from every possible view, and how it 'really' looks.

Mirrors are seen not only to give a complete and comprehensive geography of the body, enabling the viewing of all sides, it also is seen to tell women how they 'really look'. Even if in actuality the image offered in the mirror differs dependant upon lighting, or the size and style of the mirror. Margaret, a primary school teacher living with her husband in north London, doesn't possess a full-length mirror. In her old flat she used to have one and constantly used to have to change her outfits (she is paranoid about being pear shaped), as she saw herself in her totality and felt that her upper and lower body were not in proportion. Now she has a half-length mirror in her hallway; every morning she examines her upper body in it; she then stands on a chair and peers down to see her lower body. She admits that now only very rarely does she have to change out of her outfit multiple times. The totalising geography of the body is not possible, and she happily escapes the tyranny of the mirror, as she knows there are no full-length mirrors in her place of work. Margaret becomes complicit in her own deception; although she knows the shape of her body, and the problems she used to have, as she will not have to encounter her total body reflection, she does not have to care. When faced with her image

before, she felt she had to option when presented with this 'reality' but to change her clothes. When looking in the mirror, her reflected image becomes 'real', she sees her self as she appears, yet is simultaneously both positioned as the subject and object of that vision. She is uncomfortable with the 'seen' being 'me'. For Margaret, the half-mirror is employed for her purposes, as a way of protecting herself, and making it robust. There are many examples of other women I spoke to who didn't look in mirrors, or make an effort with their appearance, and as such they too are not allowing themselves to become vulnerable to the gaze or the tyranny of their own reflected appearance in the same way. This process does not work for Sadie, as she has become so reliant upon this reinforcing gaze which has come to constitute her self.

Conclusion:

This chapter has outlined how, through the application of make-up, preparation of the skin and body and the selection of outfits, dressing is a creative act of self construction. In the introduction it was suggested that a possible means of understanding this is through the notion of objectification (Miller, 1987). An essential part of the progressive development and creation of the self is seeing the self as an object, so, clothing may be a particular external form through which the self is considered. However, this externalisation of the self through a material form is only half of the process of self-development. In order for the process to be completed it has to be reintegrated. At the end of Sadie's extensive processes of getting ready, she considers her image in the mirror before her and is satisfied that there is an aesthetic 'fit', as she looks like herself. Just as common are moments of aesthetic disjuncture, where the image in the mirror does not

correspond to the wearer's anticipated self. The incomplete process of self-development is particularly marked when considered through clothing. As the clothing is actually worn on the body, if it remains separate to the self, the wearer perceives the externality of the clothing all the more poignantly. The person is unable to feel comfortable in their clothing.

'Comfort' is often assumed to be a natural thing, relating to the softness of clothing, or lack of constriction. However, what emerges from this chapter is that in fact 'comfort' corresponds to aesthetic fit. When Sadie looked at her unmade-up face, and tracksuit-ed body she was unable to recognise the reflection as her self. Despite wearing soft, loose clothing, she felt uncomfortable. As the reflection she sees does not correspond to herself, she becomes aware of the clothing she is wearing as external. Despite her attempt to become a sporty, healthy person, not concerned with make-up or hair, in experiencing this moment of aesthetic disjuncture in front of the mirror, she realises she has failed.

The centrality of the mirror in this case-study is not a one-off example and highlights a crucial point to emerge from this chapter. The process of the creation and interrogation of the self through dressing is more complex than women simply considering themselves in the external form of clothing for two main reasons. Firstly, women are not just considering themselves through clothing, but as externalised in many different material media: different mirrors, photographs, the gaze and opinions of others. Often photographs are not used in the actual act of dressing; women's perception of themselves in photographs does however feed-back into the selection of outfits. A photograph captures

a moment from a continuum. This moment, taken from a particular angle, with a fleeting facial gesture in certain lighting conditions, is then frozen within the photograph. In seeming opposition to this is the mirror, which is a fleeting image which faces women as they look at them. Similarly dependent upon what kind of mirror or reflective surface women are looking into, the nature of what looks back at them will differ. Mirror's reflections are thus as partial as a photograph.

Importantly, both of these media are seen as being informative of what women 'really' look like. On numerous occasions, I have been looking through photographs with women and they have gasped at a particularly unflattering representation "I don't really look like that do I?" In the case of both photographs and mirrors, women are often therefore faced with a reflection that they didn't expect. When faced with such a 'true' depiction of themselves, it is impossible to ignore this. When Margaret had a full length mirror, she was forced to change her outfits on numerous occasions. However, even though she knows her body shape is still the same, as she is no longer being faced with this in a visual external form, she feels there is no need to act upon it. The gaze and opinions of others often have a similar impact: in Sadie's case they force her to really look at her reflection in the mirror, and reconsider it. What is common between all three media is that women are forced to 'be seen', that is they are compelled to see themselves, rather than just appear as they imagine or aspire to looking.

The multiple points through which women come to consider themselves in external form are all clearly different, yet they interact within the act of dressing and impact upon each

other, as the opinions of others force a reassessment of the mirror image and the clothing. The commonality between these different media is that they are all seen to offer a 'true' depiction, the reality of a woman's appearance. This holds true for both women who spend a long time cultivating their appearance in front of the mirror, and equally those who do not given the omni-presence of reflective surfaces and mirrors in everyday life. Often, avoiding mirrors or unflattering photographs becomes a strategy in avoiding the tyranny of being confronted with an appearance that, as it is perceived to be authentic, cannot be ignored.

Similarly for Sadie, her time in front of the mirror is carefully managed. In focusing upon the parts of herself in the mirror she manipulates the ephemerality of the image offered by the mirror and does not fixate upon the fragments of herself. Simultaneously as she only considers her whole image at the end of the elaborate processes of self-aestheticisation, she is able to consider this as her actual appearance. The implications this have for the self are both positive and negative, making the self either more robust or indeed more fragile. The process is positive when there is a 'fit' between the image offered in the mirror and the idealised self women aspire to being. However, given the multiple different forms through which women consider themselves when dressing, the points of disruption are multiple. In order for the final look to be successful, women have to reconcile their selves as depicted in different mirrors and, as such, the remembered opinions of others, which may often be contradictory.

The extent to which women make themselves robust is also linked to the degree to which they cultivate themselves at the surface. The main examples in this chapter appear to be opposite in this respect: Louise, merely using the mirror to check for blemishes in her appearance and Sadie, for whom the mirror and extensive processes on her skin and hair are fundamental to the self she constructs daily. Yet when these two examples are considered in terms of the robustness of the self, and moments of vulnerability, a fundamental similarity emerges. Louise's daily processes, whilst minimal, are the same everyday, hoping to not be noticed; on the occasion of her friend's party, when her clothing and appearance are the focus of attention, Louise feels vulnerable and exposed.

Similarly Sadie carries out the same processes every-day; when she joins the gym and tries to change herself she is unable to, and becomes vulnerable. When women carry out the same processes daily they have made themselves so robust that they are unable to change. If they were to constitute themselves at the surface in a different manner regularly then it would be possible to experiment with themselves, as they have 'put on' a different self regularly (seen for example in teenage experimentation with styles). However, when Sadie constructs herself at the surface, and therefore is also creating and 'putting on' her self daily, as she does the same all the time, this is no longer artifice, but is the actuality of her appearance. The paradox being that the more successful the process of objectification is over time, the more robust she makes her self. This delimits the potentialities of the self, as the robustness is dependent upon carrying out exactly the same processes all the time.

Dressing therefore involves the negotiation of various different external forms of the self, which are expected to come together in the final outfit, in a moment of aesthetic fit. This is the first reason why dressing is not merely the trying on of an outfit and considering 'is this me'. The second factor that complicates this is that this assumes that there is already a 'me' that is present in the clothing. Whilst this may be true for clothing that is no longer worn, when clothing is worn again it is not possible to merely put on a former self, as dressing involves considerations of social occasion, expectations and the gaze of those present. As such, the 'me' that we are trying to create is shifting and contextual, as the outfit has to fit both the personal preferences and the social expectations, these are not separate aspects of an outfit, but rather must be fused as 'me' on a particular social occasion of wearing. As Goffman notes (1971a), the real is as cultivated as the evidently made up. Whilst women still talk about the 'real' me, the authentic self is in fact shifting and in part created by social situations. As the act of dressing conjoins the social and the individual it is the moment wherein the self is being created, bringing together histories of wearing, previous assemblages, and the novelty of the particular occasion for which things are being worn. The 'real' self is bound to be shifting as this is where the personal and social meet. As such, what emerges from a study of getting dressed is that the self is always to a degree relational, demonstrated in this chapter through the imagined, and actual gaze and opinions of others. The next chapter will consider how women are constituted relationally in clothing, through looking at the social networks in which women exist, and how clothing mediates such relationships.

Chapter 6: The Relational Self: Situating Wardrobes in Social Networks.

One of the central contentions of this thesis is that clothing is not merely an expression of individual preferences and choices, but, through its materiality clothing is co-agentic in the construction of diverse aspects of self-hood. As the previous chapter made apparent, the creative act of getting dressed incorporates both individual preferences and the social expectations' of the specific occasion of wearing clothes. As such, notions of 'an individual' being expressed through clothing come to appear increasingly tenuous. Throughout my fieldwork I was struck by the amount of clothing women possessed that was bought for them by their mothers, other relatives, or friends. Women's important relationships hang in their wardrobes, as particular relationships exist in the external form of clothing. If dressing is understood as an act of self-construction, what is to be considered here is how it may be a means through which women expand upon the possibilities of the self, by dressing in relationships.

Traditional anthropological discussions of kinship invariably focus upon obligations and mutual dependence. However, the absence of any discussion of self-construction within such accounts implies that kinship and relationships exist in opposition to the self, which is free from ties and obligations. Conversely in the case of British kinship, Strathern (1992) has argued that kinship both produces, and depends upon, the individuality and autonomy of persons. Individuality here is not seen in opposition to social relations, but as part of the same cultural matrix. Connections and ties between people are not solely a result of enforced obligations prescribed by role, or the constraints of kinship, but as

Macfarlane (1987) has argued, also arise out of choices made. In a British context, Strathern has argued that there is a complementarity between kinship and individualism (Strathern, 1992). In the case of the pivotal parent-child relationship, whilst the parent may act out of normative expectations of parenting and providing for children, and as such come to 'stand' for the relationship, the development of the child is signified by its growing autonomy and individual identity.

Strathern is useful in introducing the complex ways in which connectivities and dependence may exist in a culture where there is a core value of individualism. The implication of Strathern's argument for an understanding of clothing is that clothing is not just an expression of freedom from constraints. Throughout my fieldwork I was struck by 'autonomous' and independent women passing clothing back to mothers to dispose of, still shopping with their mothers and relying on their husband's opinions. These same women are clear and explicit about their autonomy and individual self-sufficiency, but in a way echo Strathern in recognizing that their very individualism is the product of these relationships. An example of this is the sought-for respect of mothers and husbands that give them confidence in their subsequent relationship to others. In as much as this can appear contradictory or even clumsy as an observation when verbalized, it is often the more subtle material practice which demonstrates this complementarity between relationships and individualism. When a person is considered through the multiple constituent parts of their relationships, of which clothing is one, the myriad clothing practices allow the possibility of simultaneous dependence and autonomy. MacFarlane (1987) emphasizes 'choice' in British kinship, as individuals redefine and

construct relationships as a negotiated process. As such, clothing is a particular material form through which women exercise their 'choice', as a material means of managing multiple relationships.

The same lesson that was learnt in previous chapters with respect to the self, here applies to relationships. Clothing is not an expression of a relationship, which pre-figures any material forms, but is an integral aspect of the formation of relationships. The question to be asked here is in what ways do relationships, or aspects of them, come to be externalized through clothing. A crucial aspect of this is the ways in which clothing is systematically divergent from language as a form of expression. Aspects of a relationship to which women do not want to give explicit acknowledgement may be dealt with more subtly through the material form of clothing. The independent woman may be dependent, one friend may be jealous of another. As a subtle material practice, such contradictions are possible as they are not made explicit, and as such clothing does not necessarily cohere with the rest of the relationship.

Through keeping items gifted to them, yet not wearing them, clothing is a means through which women may accept and reject aspects of relationships. Therefore this chapter will look at both the practices that pertain to clothing, and the relationships that hang in the wardrobe. Raised in the chapter on personal aesthetics was the possibility that the wardrobe is a form of extended self (Gell, 1998). Therefore, if relationships exist through clothing, it would follow that the self is extended through relationships. As such, if these items are worn, women are in effect dressing in relationships. The paradox here being

that we extend the self through 'firmly attaching it to social relationships' (Osteen, 2002: 33), rather than social relations coming to stand in opposition to the self. In wearing items that externalize attributes of other people, women are able to expand upon the possibilities of the self.

Mother-daughter relationships: contradictory strategies through clothing

Clothing in Britain has been considered both in terms of practices of exchange (Gregson and Beale, 2004), provisioning (Clarke, 2000) and gifting (Corrigan, 1995), all of which illustrate the connection between clothing and relationships. The main relationships through clothing that are discussed in this chapter are: mother-daughter, sexual partners and wider friendship groups. It became clear from my fieldwork that the relationship to which clothing is most important is between mothers and daughters. This relationship is evident both in women's remembrances of childhood, as the mother was the primary purchaser, and in many instances right through to a continued yet redefined involvement in adulthood. This is not to negate the involvement of others, such as fathers, siblings and grandparents. However as this relationship is so foundational, it will form the focus of this section. The purchasing of clothing for children forms part of more general patterns of domestic consumption, as mothers are the primary source of food and clothing provisioning (Jackson and Moores, 1995). In childhood this relationship is one of economic dependence, and simultaneously a means through which particular preferences are inculcated and naturalised. As the daughters grow older this clothing relationship becomes contested (Corrigan, 1995). Miller (1997) has argued, with reference to middle-class mothers in North London, that infants are initially conceptualized as an extension of

the mother. The mother's understanding of her connectedness to her child becomes problematic as the child starts exercising their own choices regarding clothing, negating this initial narcissism. As the women whose wardrobes I looked at were all over 18 years old (although informal conversations were held with daughters as young as 4), the focus is less upon these early stages of socialization than upon how this contested domain of autonomy, the mother's role as provisioner and shifting mother-daughter relationship, is negotiated into adulthood.

As a relationship that develops over time, it is impossible to separate out the wardrobe as a form of externalised biography from the relationships which constitute this. As Stanley points out, individual biographies do not exist in isolation, but rather women exist in relationships with other people. The first example taken here is that of Theresa, discussed in the chapter on biography, yet here this biography is understood as it incorporates the significant relationships in her life. Items that are present in the wardrobe are not static repositories, yet through dynamic clothing practices are in a state of movement and flux (Gregson and Beale, 2004). So too relationships shift, as Theresa's wardrobe is temporally dynamic in incorporating her mother, sister, husband, children and mother-in-law.

Theresa has bought less than a quarter of the clothing that hangs in her wardrobe. The items she has bought consist of expensive 'treats' to perk herself up, in the days when she was still working in London, practical items, like fleeces for keeping her warm around the house and 'fun, fashion' items. Many of the items given to her by others have been

handed down by her mother: all expensive pieces, by designers such as MaxMara, Katherine Hammett or Ghost, in luxurious natural fabrics such as cashmere or silk. The dominant style of clothing handed down is loose fitting tunic style jumpers or cardigans. Despite having been worn extensively by her mother, as these jumpers are in good quality fabric, and had good care taken of them, they have maintained their shape and softness of fabric.

One such item is a charcoal grey open knit tunic jumper in soft wool. Theresa remembers her mother wearing it over a period of years when she was a teenager. Now that Theresa has moved to the countryside, her mother has passed it down to her. She wears it often, on a slightly cooler summer's day, slipping it on in the evening as a chic yet easy piece. As this jumper was worn next to her mother's body, in the very act of wearing it she is being brought into physical contact with the item she so strongly associates with her mother. As discussed in the chapter on biography, it is through the sensual experiences of wearing clothing that Theresa was able to recapture the former potentialities of herself. Here, in a similar manner, Theresa is situating herself at least in one small measure in the position of her mother, through the sensuality of the clothing. The previous histories of the item are not negated, but extended as a continuous trajectory that now includes her. She is not 'taking on' her mother in her entirety, just the aspects that are externalised in the clothing.

These handed down items are a crucial aspect of their mother-daughter relationship, yet also important are particular practices and shared sartorial preferences. For many children,

the development of their own autonomy from their parents is manifest in the rejection of the mother's continued buying for them, and the assertion of their own preferences. However, as women mature, I found that in most cases, women's preferences start to converge with that of their mothers, as a signifier of a redefined relationship with their mother and their past. Theresa, like her mother, has many items in her wardrobe made of cashmere, velvet or silk, often buying loose fitting tunic style tops. These preferences are activated through items her mother buys, passes down, or that Theresa buys on shared shopping trips with her mother. In contrast, there is a large section of her wardrobe that is dissimilar to her mother's (stretch jeans with embroidered patterns on them, and little gypsy style tops), and these are all items she buys for herself, from cheap high street outlets, such as New Look or H and M. An example of one such 'fun' pair of jeans and a top (both of which her husband dislikes) and of a top typical of those her mother gives her are seen in the photographs on the following page:



Photo 9: Theresa's 'fun' jeans



Photo 10: 'fun' gypsy style top

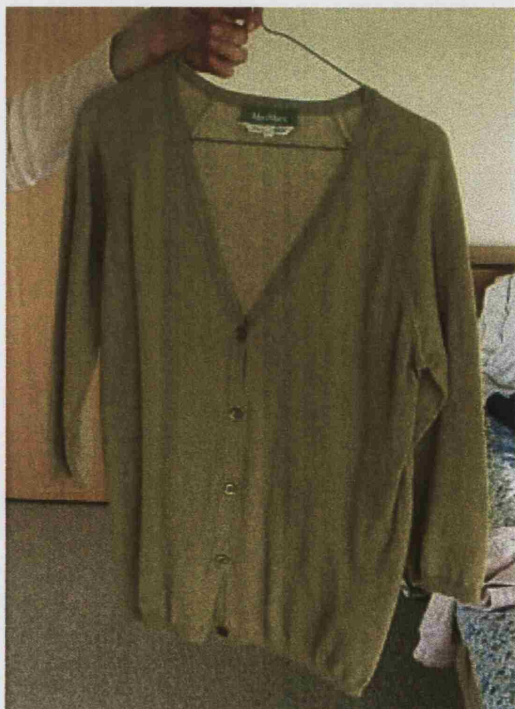


Photo 11: Cashmere Maxmara cardigan, gifted from mother

The contrast between these two domains of clothing in her wardrobe make clear that her relationships through clothing are ambivalent: one where Theresa makes her own choices of fun and fashionable items, yet at the same time she is allowing herself to be dependent, to be mothered. Theresa adopts more than one strategy through clothing; in choosing items from the shops based upon choices and preferences she knows do not coincide with either her husband or mother she is creating a space through clothing that is entirely 'individual'. The opposition is necessary, in order to allow the aspects of her self that are dependent upon her mother, and in turn the areas of her life where she is dependent upon her husband for financial and emotional support.

This maintenance of a former relationship through clothing also expands into the 3-way dynamic between herself, her mother and her sister Patsy. The close family unit is maintained and created through the continued passage of clothing back to their mother. When Theresa gets rid of her clothes, her mother helps sort out the wardrobe, and takes the better quality clothes, such as old work suits to sell in a second hand shop in her home town. She does the same for Patsy; thus she gives to and takes away from Theresa and Patsy's wardrobe. Even though all three are financially independent, and buy most of their own clothing, Patsy and Theresa return clothing to their mother to dispose of. When either of them has stains or marks on their clothes, they give them to their mother to sort out 'she can work magic with stains' (Theresa). Theresa herself is very practical in such matters, and if she stains an item, she will re-dye it and carry on wearing it.

Patsy is not quite so pragmatic and her propensity to stain of clothing is an evident source of anguish at times; Patsy is meant to be buying her first house, yet every time I look at her clothes there is another purchase that I am forbidden from telling Theresa about: "I'm so naughty!" Although Patsy does appear to enjoy playing the role of the younger, disobedient sister, she was particularly concerned on one occasion when I visited her, about a new camel coloured suede skirt she had bought from Morgan. Having bought it on the Saturday, she wore it out on that same evening to go out for dinner to celebrate a friend's birthday, teamed with her new white ruffle shirt, also from Morgan. A few glasses of wine later, during one of Patsy's anecdotes, an over-exuberant sweep of the arm also flings the oil drenched piece of avocado on her fork onto the bottom of the skirt. A botched attempt to rub it on the spot merely spreads the oil. The next day she tried applying her 'trusty' Italian Dry Clean spray. The end result is a large white patch at the bottom of the skirt. Patsy is crestfallen. It was her favourite (although she did buy another 'sneaky' skirt from LK Bennett to "cheer myself up"). She now has had the cunning plan of dyeing it plum red "no-one need ever know!" Patsy is a mature responsible adult, but in the context of her family, and her clothing rituals she still occupies the position of a naughty girl. Her passion for shopping is well known, and in this arena in relation to her mother she is allowed a degree of irresponsibility as this is how she exists and performs in relation to her sister and mother.

These continuities coexist with the new relationships in Theresa's life: her husband, children and mother-in-law (who also buys a great deal of clothing for Theresa). By keeping hold of particular clothing preferences and practices, Theresa is able to maintain

an aspect of the relationship with her mother. However, given the quantity of clothing possessed and the diversity of possibilities that surround it, she is able to draw in these new relationships. This is seen through the practice of dressing for dinner. Theresa's mother-in law Alison was someone who, having never worked, spent each day at home looking after her two children, and preparing dinner for her husband on his return home from work. Each evening she engaged in the ritual of dressing for dinner, changing out of the clothing she wore every day into a new outfit, even though ordinarily she and her husband only ate dinner at home. Theresa's life follows a similar pattern: staying at home in the day looking after the house and the children, when she does not have to concern herself with clothes that her husband will like and wears clothing she sees as "fun", yet is still comfortable and practical. She has a penchant for 70s style hipster trousers, flared jeans, with glitter embellishments, and gypsy style tops which Simon her husband dislikes, preferring a more "classic" look, hating hipsters as they "cut up a woman's shape". She dresses for dinner every evening when he returns; as the children watch DVDs from 6 to 7:30pm, Theresa has her evening shower. She selects an outfit to wear from the wardrobe, often thinking in terms of what Simon might like.

The children are then read a bedtime story, and the lights turned off. Theresa finishes making the supper, opens a bottle of wine, and her husband returns at about 8:00. Theresa, through clothing practices, is assimilating herself into the practices of her husband's family; continuing the tradition of her mother-in-law, yet also constituting herself in clothing she imagines Simon would like to see. This is also important in the context of food as her mother-in-law Alison is renowned for being a fantastic cook,

knowing this not only from Simon's constant comments, but also having sampled some of Alison's culinary creativity. Theresa spends a great deal of time cooking, and regularly phones Alison for advice and recipes. She is always delighted when Simon compliments her on her cooking. Through food, and the clothing rituals that pertain to this she aspires to live up to Simon's expectations of his mother. However, the items of clothing she selects for dinner are not just new (although Alison does buy her clothing); she often selects items that her mother has given to her. So through clothing she is able to bring together her dual membership of two families, her existences as a daughter, yet also as a desirable wife and mother. Theresa is able to manage her existence in multiple, often overlapping, relationships; at the same time she manages her autonomy and individual preferences through her separate range of "fun" clothing.

Coherence through clothing

Theresa's example of a transition in her life from being a daughter, single and then a married woman raises the issues of how women negotiate degrees dependence upon a husband, mother and their own autonomy. It becomes apparent that clothing may be a crucial means through which this relationship of dependence to the mother may exist, as a non-verbalised acknowledgement of connection. Joanna is someone who has very little desire for autonomy, and seeks to negotiate joint dependence upon her mother and husband. This is in part a product of cultural context, as she is Korean. This is not to suggest that her passivity and lack of desire for autonomy is something which characterises all Korean women (Kibria, 2002). Rather, the particular ways in which she emphasises the importance in her life of being a 'good wife' and the centrality of family,

is a product of how she was brought up and socialised in a South Korean context. The vestiges of Confucianism and traditional Korean values has lead to the development of what Cho has termed a 'mass society' (1995), with few communal or voluntary organizations, leading to the centrality of the extended family. Joanna's mother only started working once the children were at school, and then only part time, spending most of her time devoted to her family, and in particular encouraging her children's educational progress. The family was her occupation, as typical of many middle class South Korean women (Cho, 1998). Even in this context Joanna is extreme, in wanting to be constituted entirely through her familial relationships. Her example proves a useful comparison to Theresa, in clarifying the issues of how dependency and autonomy are negotiated in clothing, and introduces the extent to which, if clothing is an externalised form of aspects of a relationship, women are dressing themselves in relationships.

Born and brought up in Korea, three and a half years ago she married an English man whom she met through her church, and straight after the marriage moved to London to be a Christian missionary, converting British students. Although her English was practically fluent she had never visited Britain before. Whereas for Theresa, she was able to negotiate the shift to being a wife through many continuous, if subtly shifting, clothing practices; for Joanna the rupture, both cultural and in terms of relationship status, is so marked this is not possible. When Joanna lived in Korea, her mother bought and selected all of her clothing for her, her brother, father and sister (who asserted her own tastes at the age of 13). As a child, teenager, and even a university student her mother selected jeans and either checkered shirts or casual brightly coloured aertex style tops, short

sleeved t-shirts with a little collar and buttons¹². When she finished her degree and started her MA, her mother decided that it was time to start dressing in a more mature fashion, and bought a range of navy and grey skirt suits for her, despite the fact that other students were still wearing jeans. Joanna still wore the suits, having accepted that her mother bought and selected her clothing. As a product of never making her own choices, a strong degree of passivity is inculcated in Joanna. In part this is due to her upbringing, through which she has developed certain traits and values. In South Korea, the cultural heritage of Confucianism, and associated ideologies position women in particular ways (Bedeski, 1994), as they are expected to be 'mild and faithful' and follow their husbands (Cho, 1998: 28). Whilst cultural shifts have led to a diminishing emphasis upon this for younger women in the last 20 years, these values are still present in particular in Joanna's mothers generation, and as such has effected how Joanna has been brought up. Keen to please her mother, and thinking that aesthetic decisions do not concern her, Joanna allows her mother to make selections for her. She therefore fails to develop ordinary skills and competences in assembling and selecting clothing.

She did have a brief period when she attempted to buy clothes for herself while she was at university, living in halls of residence with other girls. Liberated from her familial home, she attempted to consolidate this freedom through asserting some of her own aesthetic control. Despite having the desire and will to choose her own clothes, she was unable to. Overwhelmed by the immensity of possible items to buy, Joanna had never really been faced with the clothing in shops before; without her mother's guidance, Joanna was unsure of which direction to turn. Floundering in the immense variety of

¹² Such Americanised 'preppy' styles are extremely common in Korea.

styles, shapes, colours, textures that surrounded her, she ended up buying an array of “party dresses”. Ultimately she had no need for such dresses, and being far removed from her usual understated aesthetic, she was far too self conscious ever to wear them. Not only does Joanna therefore lack the experience and skills of shopping and assemblage, her aesthetic as developed through her mother’s clearly defined style, has a rigid in-built conservatism. After this brief failed foray into sartorial decisions, she happily relinquished aesthetic control back to her mother.

The occasion of her marriage, and subsequent move to Britain was an occasion of immense rupture, both in terms of life-style, culture and indeed clothing practices. When Paul came over to Korea for the wedding, her mother’s aesthetic dictatorship first started to crumble, as he purchased a couple of items for his bride: a pale blue long sleeved jacket and matching shift dress, and a plain black skirt suit. Joanna’s mother dislikes the pale blue suit in particular, yet both are now failsafe items for Joanna. Such a transition from maternal aesthetic to that of her husband’s becomes accentuated when they move to London. Getting married involved a shift in her priorities, now defining herself primarily in terms of her husband; for every item of clothing we go through in her wardrobe she tells me whether Paul likes it or not. She always agrees with him, as she is someone who is completely pliant and has no clearly defined opinion on such things, her aesthetic judgments are always derivative. The clothing she wears and thinks is most appropriate depends on her relationship with a particular person.

However, wearing clothing that her husband wants to see her in is extremely problematic as he does not buy clothing for her in the same manner in which her mother did. When Joanna first arrived in Britain, she unquestioningly carried on wearing the same clothing as before; as her clothing has always been selected and provided for her, clothing rarely occupies a major position in her thoughts. The first time she met her father-in-law, Roger, she wore a dress she bought with her mother just before getting married, shown below:



Photo 12: Joanna's 'sailor' dress

A couple of months after she had been in England, she was going to another important dinner and unthinkingly picked out this dress. Prior to going out, Paul delicately informed her that the outfit resembled a school uniform. Joanna started to panic; not only did she want to please her husband, she suddenly became aware that there might be a distinct English aesthetic, rendering all her Korean clothing inappropriate. Whilst many of her friends are members of her church, and therefore fellow Koreans, in the context of her husband's colleagues she feels self-conscious and out of place. The clothes she had been previously able to wear without reflection suddenly became visible as Korean clothing, as her mother's particular taste. Unable to wear anything from her former life, worried about letting her husband down she settled on a black suit bought for her by Paul. Such a moment is one of transition for Joanna, as she realizes that she must cultivate her own aesthetic; she can no longer rely on such decisions to be made for her. Paul has little interest in what she wears per se, yet it becomes incredibly important to her to dress in a way in which she imagines he would like. Clothing becomes important to her as it is an aspect of their relationship which does not live up to or cohere with the totality. For Joanna, being a good wife is foundational to who she is. She wants all aspects of her relationship to fit in with this, having no desire for an autonomous identity through clothing. She is unlike Theresa who manages the potentially contradictory aspects of her self and her relationships through different material forms, verbally, through food and clothing.

As Paul rarely expresses an opinion on what she wears she is forced to have to choose clothing that she imagines he would like. She knows that he has extremely defined

opinions about aesthetic preferences, being extremely minimalist, as is apparent in their interior décor. When they moved into their flat, on a council estate in Archway in North London, the first step they took was to paint every single surface in the flat white. On the walls there are a few photographs of family members, but they remain relatively sparse. A great deal of the furniture is from Ikea, being both affordable and fitting in with the minimalist look. Such minimalism translates into his own clothing, shopping in French Connection and liking to wear 'neutral, classic clothing'.

This becomes problematic as she had always relied on what her mother had bought. Her mother does still send clothing to her; this exacerbates Joanna's clothing dilemmas as the items fall within Joanna's old aesthetic: bright aertex tops, and patterned stripy shirts. Joanna decides to articulate Paul's comments on the parcels to her mother, that the clothing is too garish and bright. Joanna is jubilant when, after 2 years of sending clothing unwanted by Joanna and Paul, in the next parcel is a selection of plain round necked blue and grey t-shirts for both of them to wear. The resolution of Joanna's problem is her mother selecting items based upon what Paul has stated. Here Joanna is able to circumvent making any choices over clothing and indeed failing, as her mother is able to interpret and imagine what Paul likes. She therefore is able to negate the autonomy that Paul bestowed on her by not selecting items for her and be both dependent upon her husband and mother in different ways.

Now that the problem of what to wear is partially resolved, there still remains the issue of what to do with the many things that Joanna's mother has sent in monthly parcels over

the last few years. Although recognizing the love and kindness that goes behind such packages, they are greeted with a slight feeling of dread as they are opened to reveal clothing, foodstuffs, saucepans, and other items such as cushions or even duvets. The unwanted items amass and find a home in their storage room. It is filled with mounds of saucepans, unwanted kitchen equipment, and, most evidently, oceans of clothing which engulf the space. 2 large crates sit on one side of the room, the lids cannot be fastened as the jumpers and shirts stuffed within defy their incarceration and spill out over the top. The entirety of the rest of the room consists of piles of bin-liners, each one restraining the mass of clothing which threatens to overwhelm the room. Such clothing is not evidence of a shameful, hidden propensity to materialism, but rather the problematic gifts and provisions that Joanna's mother keeps sending.

These items are also a source of dispute between Paul and Joanna, as Paul wanted to give the unused and unworn items away. Joanna agrees with him in the case of saucepans and duvets which are seen mainly in functional terms "we don't need all of these things, why does she send them". Some are kept "just in case", others are given away. However, she feels the clothing is a different matter. Although not a forthright or argumentative person Joanna stood her ground "these are not just clothes, they're my mother's love. It's her heart. I can't throw them away". It is the clothing, and not the other items that Joanna cannot throw away. When she sees the colours, the patterns and the fabrics of the clothing, she sees the style she wore for the first 25 years of her life. The checkered shirts come to embody and constitute a crucial aspect of Joanna's relationship to her mother. It is through this clothing style that her mother has socialized her, provided for her and

loved her as she grew up; whereas saucepans have never been bought for her before, and as such Joanna is able to see them in purely functional terms. The clothing is a materialization of her mother's love, and this is precisely why it matters and in the end why these clothes become such a burden.

The ways in which gifted objects are inseparable from the giver are well-documented anthropologically (Mauss 1992, Godelier, 1999, Osteen, 2002), and evidenced here in the items sent over by Joanna's mother. As such, Joanna cannot see the items in terms of their functionality, as she cannot separate the items out from her mother's love. Clothing is not a separate expression of her mother's love in their relationship, but a particular material manifestation of that love, constituted through years of providing for her daughter through clothing. Joanna's decision to keep this clothing is important as she wishes to hold on to the love the items externalise, but it is also important that she chooses not to wear them. Theresa is happy to wear the items her mother used to wear, as a way of accepting this aspect of her relationship to her mother, and establishing a continuity between them, despite the fact that in the rest of her life she is no longer dependent upon her mother. However, Joanna cannot wear the items as this would be a form of acceptance of her mother's role as aesthetic judge in her life, a relationship she now wants with her husband. In keeping the items yet not wearing them she is redefining the relationship, she is still the recipient of her mother's love and her mother is still able to provide for her. As these aspects are separated out from the role of aesthetic arbiter, Joanna is able to therefore accept aspects of the relationship yet reject others.

Provisioning as the constitution of mothers:

Joanna has to deal with the unworn clothing with such consideration as she is handling the fragility of her mother's love. Clothing is crucial to not only how mother's constitute daughters through provisioning of clothing, but also in their self-conception, through buying clothing for their daughters, as both an extension of themselves, and in defining their own role as a mother. Joanna's mother is able to manifest her love through the gifting of clothing, and furthermore as she is so far away geographically, unable to be there for her all the time, she is able to constitute her adequacy as a mother through this role of provisioning. This dynamic is also well demonstrated by the relationship between Emanuela, and her daughter Katy, aged 12. Both love clothing and have an active shopping relationship. When Katy was really young, Emanuela remembers the frustration of not being able to buy the individual style clothing she wanted for Katy. The only shop where colourful clothing for children was available was Next and at the time the fashion was for lime green and pink. Emanuela hated the fact that any child in such colours, meant that it was instantly recognizable where the clothes had been purchased. Emanuela wanted Katy to look unique and satisfied this desire by buying clothes from a range of shops, including second hand shops. She used to dye them unusual colours. She admits she bought "mini adult things rather than baby frilly stuff". She favoured buying things in bold prints. Emanuela's own desire to appear unique and striking was projected onto her daughter; as a small child Katy was mostly with Emanuela, and thus becomes an extension of Emanuela's own style, (Miller, 1997, Clarke, 2000), as a reconstituted version of how Emanuela imagined herself. However from about the age of 3 years old onward, Katy started defining for herself what styles she liked, and Emanuela could no

longer dress her in the things she herself liked. Like Emanuela, she states that she wants to look different from everyone else.

When she goes to Manchester, Katy's great auntie, and grandmother take her shopping. Emanuela says when she was little they'd "dress her like a doll". Katy's nickname used to be 'Imelda', due the massive quantity of shoes that she had. Emanuela had to put a ban on it as there was no way she would ever wear so many shoes. She has always tried to buy Katy practical clothing; however as grandmother and great auntie, they knew they did not have to worry about such things and tended to indulge her in more frivolous purchases. Emanuela remembers one time when she was about 10, they bought her a halter-neck all in one denim suit with buttons and a collar. She wore it once. They like to indulge her, to buy her things that are 'special', like designer DKNY jeans. As they have more distant links, such relatives do not have to worry about her becoming spoilt or buying practical clothing that is necessary, but buy fantasy clothing. Through this Emanuela is able to define her role as the provider, as the caring mother (Miller, 1997). This ties in to the distinction Jackson and Moores (1995) make regarding giving of clothing as one off gifts, as opposed to routine, mundane provisioning where mothers buy for their daughters. The latter is part of the process of maternal care and domestic responsibility and the ways in which the ongoing process of 'mothering' occurs (Clarke, 2000: 88).

Even when Katy starts to exert her own agency through making her own clothing selections, as Emanuela still accompanies her on the shopping trips and is the main

financier of them, she is still involved in the process as provisioner. Although Katy is a teenager, and thus financially dependent upon her mother, I encountered numerous examples of women within my fieldwork who seemed in other respects entirely independent from their parents, yet through clothing a different picture emerges. Clothing becomes a way women negate their independence in other areas of life, seen in many instances through the return of clothing to their mothers. For example, Rosie (discussed in chapter 4) is an incredibly high earner, and owns a large house in Hampstead, where she lives with her husband. She is financially independent, and her mother offers no financial aid; as Rosie is extremely clear in her fashion tastes her mother rarely if ever buys clothes for her. However, every 6 months or so when Rosie and her husband sort out their unwanted clothing (and sometimes other items), they take them back to her mother Pat to sort through, keep items she wants for herself, or dispose of via charity shops. Rosie still maintains this relationship to clothing with her mother. Her mother is positioned as pragmatic, able to take deal with the unwanted clothing; whilst Rosie still selects her own items, and pays for them, she is able to allow a role for her mother without threatening her own independence. As it is done through the un-verbalised means of clothing exchange there is no need for explicit acknowledgement of this.

Negotiations of sexual partners

Joanna and Theresa's examples show the ways in which the many layered aspects of relationships are present in clothing, negotiating mothers, husbands and other family members. Joanna's move from primarily being constructed through the clothing her mother buys her, to dependence upon her husband, is an extreme case. For most women I

interviewed who were married, all had had a period of independence, living alone or with friends prior to with their husbands. Being married involves having to renegotiate this independence and autonomy through the inclusion of a husband. Initially these negotiations centre upon finances, as even if resources are not always shared (in terms of having a joint bank account), the ways in which women construct themselves as a wife links to their capacity to budget (Delphy, 1995). Even when women have the resources to buy clothing just for themselves, very rarely do they spend guiltlessly (Wilson, 1995). For example, Helen is 22 and lives in Nottingham with her husband, who is in full time employment, yet she is still a student, doing an MA in fashion design. Their finances are limited. Her prize possession in her wardrobe is some brown three quarter length cord trousers, which she purchased from the Karen Millen sale, after Christmas. She bought them at a time when she had been through a phase of buying lots of clothes: jeans, boots and cardigans. She could not bear the thought of telling her husband that she had made yet another clothes purchase. Although she knew he would not be angry, she felt guilty and so decided to hide them from him for a few months.

During this period the only times she wore them were when she knew he would be leaving for work before her, and she would leave university campus whilst he was still at work, and be able to change furtively before he returned home. After a few months, she was hankering to wear them to an evening event they were both going to, with her reddish brown boots. She slipped them on, hoping he would not notice. He commented they were nice trousers, and asked if they were new, and Helen was able to reply "I've had these for ages!" Once she had had them for months, and the fact they were no longer

new made her feel less guilty about them, as in the 3 month period of concealment, she made much fewer clothes purchases, thus justifying the trousers. As a relatively new bride, only married for 6 months when she bought the trousers, a new form of provisioning and budgeting has to be negotiated. Here the clothing shows a certain ambiguity, as Helen only makes clothing purchases for herself, and is self-financing, yet as she is married she feels accountable to someone else. Her clothing practices show this ambiguity and ambivalence: being both independent yet simultaneously constructed through her relationship to her husband.

As the previous chapter made clear, this issue of the influence of sexual partners on clothing also holds true for single women, in terms of both remembered, imagined and aspired to relationships. Patsy, currently single, herself also considers her appearance through the gaze of others. This is evidenced in the selection of underwear; when considering what underwear to wear, she is more concerned how the outfit looks from the external view. Under a white top she wears a flesh coloured bra – although she admits they are ugly in themselves, from the outside view they look better under white clothing as the outer line of the bra is not visible and thus the appearance of the top is not disturbed. She is therefore constructing herself as desirable from the perspective of others, from the outside: in. However, she also has in her underwear drawer some matching sets, for example one which is midnight blue, with gold lace trimming. Such a matching set she would wear were she in a relationship, as when the clothes are peeled off the underwear becomes visible. Here it matters that the material is lace and as such

carries connotations of sexuality, rather than being padded in flesh or apricot shades¹³.

When wearing it, she dresses herself through the imagined desire of a sexual partner, and as such through the underwear she is able to construct herself as attractive.

Processes of exchange: short term and long-term:

The focus of this chapter so far has been the negotiations between women and their mothers, sisters and sexual partners. As such the practices involved are long-term provisioning and gifting of clothing. To be considered here is the rather different practices of swapping and borrowing of clothing amongst friendship groups. This is common amongst young women, and the example chosen is that of 4 young women, Sandra, Jane, Lisa and Lizzie, all 20 or 21 years old all living in a shared house. They are all second year university students, and in a relatively impoverished position; as they are all keen on clothing and fashion, they find that borrowing each other's clothing is a way to expand upon their own wardrobes. As they met at university and have only known each other for a couple of years, none of the items are jointly owned, nor are any items owned gifted to each other. However, an extremely high level of sharing and borrowing of clothes goes on. When one of them makes a new clothing purchase, the item is tried on in front of everyone else, a process which usually involves all of the girls trying it on for future reference.

¹³ However, this does not signify that underwear is only important in terms of visibility. Many women, when they were dressing to go out, for a special occasion, almost all women, wore underwear that correlated with their outerwear (i.e. black underwear with a black outfit) – even if not visible from the outside. As it is not visible to other people, therefore underwear may be part of an overall assemblage, and may mobilize and enable feelings of sexuality.

One of the key reasons for sharing is that, as is typical of many young women, their fickle tastes are incompatible with their financial resources. As they live together, and socialise together they are constantly exposed to each other's clothing choices. Before a night out, the girls all look through their own wardrobes, and then if an outfit is found lacking, go searching through the house. For example, on a recent night out with Lizzie, Jane was adamant she was going to wear her red knee high suede boots. As a self confessed shoe addict, as is often the case with Jane, she wanted the boots to be the focus of the outfit. She therefore decided that a short skirt would best show off the boots, and opted to wear Lizzie's short pleated black miniskirt, a skirt she regularly borrows. In order for the boots to become even more of a focal point, Jane thought a black top would be most appropriate. As there are multiple tops dotted about the house in various locations, Jane set about trawling through the house trying them on until she found a suitable one, again one of Lizzie's, yet currently located in Lisa's wardrobe. The potential clothes from which the outfit would be selected were not just her limited wardrobe but all the clothes in the house become potential outfits to try on.

Clothes are in a continual state of flow, when an item is borrowed it does not reside for long in one wardrobe; the dominant items being borrowed are tops, and maybe skirts (as all the girls are practically the same size on top, trousers proving more problematic). They do not tend to borrow items such as jumpers or tops to be worn in the day, but rather the sharing of clothing is linked to social occasions in the evening. They often go out together as a household to the pub, or to a party, as they have friends in common. Going out, and the sharing of clothing, is in part how their shared life together is

constituted, with the rituals of getting ready beforehand being part of this. The fact that it is mostly going out clothing that is shared signifies that, unlike in Theresa's case of wearing the items her mother wore, these girls are not trying to 'take on' aspects of the other girls. For Theresa, the fact that her mother wore these items day in and day out, is important as the clothing embodies aspects of her mother, and the items become the shared bond between mother and daughter. Yet in the shared house, no one item is ever borrowed for long. It is the processes of exchange of clothing in the house where value and friendship is created, 'rather than value being located in specific items of clothing and their wearing' (Gregson and Beale, 2004). What matters here is that these acts of borrowing, are swiftly moving and ephemeral. It is the act of sharing, and rooting through each others wardrobes that matters. This happens in conjunction with the 4 of them going out together, whereas many other aspects of their lives are entirely separate: they do different courses, have boyfriends, separate family lives and friendship groups.

Even though the passage of clothing creates an aspect of their friendship, this passage of borrowing of clothing is also important in terms of how each girl is able to expand upon the possibilities of her self. All the girls state that they share their clothing and all are technically free to borrow each other's, yet in practice, this sharing relationship is not equal. Despite in all other aspects their friendship seeming to be equal, at the level of clothing Lizzie clearly occupies the most central position. Although both Jane and Lisa acknowledge that Lizzie has some "really cool" clothes, on no other level is she designated as being 'cooler', in terms of music or personality. In effect Lizzie is the

fashion pioneer, introducing new styles into the group¹⁴. For example, since Lizzie bought the black pleated short skirt that Jane borrowed a few months ago, there has been a gradual trend where all of the girls have started wearing short skirts. Prior to this purchase, none of the girls really regularly wore short skirts. At some point all of the girls have tried on the skirt, and both Jane and Lisa have borrowed it to go out. Lisa, on a recent shopping spree in Top Shop at Oxford Circus, bought a denim mini-skirt, with wide pleats going all the way around it. The skirt forms a rupture in her normal style of clothing, but she was so taken with Lizzie's skirt, that she started borrowing it all the time. She admits she used to have a real phobia about wearing short skirts and baring her legs, but now thinks "it's so much fun wearing short skirts!" The primary reason for Lizzie's status as fashion leader seems to be a combination of having most clothes and the fact that she tends to buy items which break out of the norm. Her clothes seem more interesting and exciting, enticing the others to try them on. The colours of the clothes in Jane's wardrobe tend to be, as is typical of most British women's wardrobes that I encountered, dominated by neutral colours such as black, grey and also lots of denim. She has been borrowing many of Lizzie's red tops recently, really loving the colour, but admits she probably wouldn't buy anything in that colour in case she didn't wear it. The clothes she buys tend to be safer, but she utilizes the bolder choices of her friends to enable her to be more adventurous.

At a verbalised level, or indeed in any other area of their relationship there is no sense in which 'status' is an issue, yet it becomes apparent through looking at these processes of

¹⁴ The ways in which fashion is 'created' is the subject of the next chapter, and the implications of this example will be discussed more there.

borrowing that Lizzie becomes the fashion leader. Rather than status being important as a homogeneous, unthinking emulation (Veblen, 1899), here it is both non-verbalised and in fact crucial to how each girl is able to construct her self. The ways in which status is created through exchange processes is worth consideration here in understanding individuals' self-construction and the simultaneous creation of an intra-household connectivity. In the case of the cycles of clothing exchange in the household, as it is Lizzie's items that are most borrowed and in demand, her items come to seem more desirable and accrue status (Osteen, 2002). However, whilst the items may be shared, the distinction between possession and ownership is important here. Weiner defines inalienable goods as something which is 'imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners' (1992: 6). Although these items are shared and worn, each girl only possesses the item temporarily so the original owner is always recognised. As clothing carries such an intimate connection to identity, the item remains linked to the original wearer. This connection is enhanced as on no occasion of borrowing the item do the girls ever borrow it for indefinite periods, where it would become linked to the new wearer. The swift passage of the item of clothing is essential. Were it to remain with one girl, her identity too may become woven in the cloth. Rather its ephemeral passage throughout the house is important as this enables status to accrue to the owner of clothing, through the other girls possessing it temporarily. As such we see here that Lizzie is expanding the possibilities of her self, as the other girls wear her clothing (Osteen, 2002). When her skirt is worn by all of the other girls, this allows the creation and reinforcement of herself as a fashion leader, as 'cool'. For the other girls, the wearing of Lizzie's items allows them to be more exuberant, or to experiment with being

cool and fashionable. Through wearing Lizzie's items they are exploring the aspects of themselves that do not exist in their own wardrobes or clothing, but which they see as potential personality facets.

There is a clear discrepancy between long-term exchanges, the continual flow of clothing in the girls' household and indeed in short term 'swaps'. In highlighting the differences between the two, Weiner challenges the notion that reciprocity signifies long-term alliances. She uses the specific example of kula exchange cycles, a system of inter- and intra-tribal trade in the Trobriand Islands (as initially documented by Malinowski, 1922). The trade of shells in the form of bracelets and necklaces is one of immense prestige and a means through which men's subjectivities, relationships and statuses are constituted. The acquisition of a particularly prestigious shell is a source of status for men, yet simultaneously the shell carries within it the obligation to pass it on. Of particular relevance here is how, through exchanges, alliances are set up¹⁵. If someone has in their temporary possession a valuable kula shell, several parties will be interested in receiving the shell and compete to become an exchange partner. In vying to receive the shell, each interested party will give a smaller shell as a kind of 'down-payment'. However, if the shell is reciprocated immediately with an equivalent shell, this signifies that any attempt to establish a partnership has been rejected. Alliances are created through delays and many layered small gifts, before the giving of the desired shell. Weiner (1992) makes the point that reciprocity, as assumed by traditional exchange theory in anthropology, and equivalence are not the important factors here but rather how to 'keep while giving'. This

¹⁵ Kula exchanges have been discussed by various commentators (such as Mauss, 1992, Campbell, 1983), however it is Weiner's discussion that will be utilized here, as she focuses specifically on how long term alliances may be created through exchange.

point is held out in other discussions of exchange, such as that pertaining to bride-wealth or dowry (Bell, 1998), wherein the many short-term self cancelling exchanges of the former are more of a form of 'payment' yet it is the latter that seeks alliances¹⁶. This raises the possibility that long term exchange, and the non-equivalent delayed return of items is the basis upon which alliances, and trust may be created. This is useful in understanding the differences between the flow of clothing in the girls' house and the more long term swaps they have with other friends.

For example Lisa has many such long-term exchanges with her friends from home and her sister. The swaps with her friends from home are more long term: returned months, maybe even a year, after the initial borrowing as these friendships have developed over a longer period. The basis of trust is one which does not necessitate immediate return. Within a similar paradigm are Lisa's swaps with her sister. Lisa sees this as more risky than swapping with her friends as they have a more volatile relationship. Her sister is a couple of years younger than Lisa and slightly slimmer, so Lisa is open to charges of making clothes stretch as well as spilling things on them. Lisa borrowed her sister's dark green silk bias cut top to go to a friend's birthday party the day before Christmas Eve. During the revelry Lisa managed to besmirch the top with a small watermark. As often typifies family rows, the arguing was immense and communal, involving their mother and grandmother. Although there is still swapping of clothes, Lisa lives in fear when she borrows anything from her sister; on its return she scours items for stains or rips, indicating Lisa's carelessness.

¹⁶ This contrast is also seen in Sahlins' theory of exchange (1972), based upon the opposition between generalized and immediate reciprocity.

The contrast between her sister and friends from home is interesting, in that both involve relationships that have developed over a long period of time, and therefore one would expect a similar pattern of clothing exchange. However, what becomes apparent is that the relationship with her sister is taken as 'given', rather than something at which they have to work and to create. They have shared parents, a shared home and a shared history. In contrast, whilst her friends have a similar shared past, clothing becomes a means through which this longevity and trust can be continued and created. Like in Weiner's discussion, what is important here is precisely that the items are not equivalent. If an item were to be given back immediately, or indeed were Lisa to demand an item back from one of her friends, this in effect would be a rejection of the strength of the friendship. As they now live in different cities, as Lisa has moved away to university, the presence of clothing in the other person's wardrobe constitutes a link between the friends. Linking to Weiner's discussion of the inalienable, where items cannot be separated from the giver, we see here that as the item is not given away personally, the self is not diminished. Unlike the case of mothers dressing daughters, this is not about creating others as an extended version of yourself, but rather allowing others to dress in your relationship, and extending the self through social relationships.

Conclusion:

This chapter, in arguing that clothing is not a passive reflection of the relational self, has sought to understand how relationships come to exist through clothing. As such, clothing is seen as an aspect of relationships, not a secondary reflection, and must be considered in

the context of the relationship in its totality. The multiple strategies adopted through clothing, whether gifted clothing is kept, disposed of, or indeed worn, offer a means through which women can order and manage relationships. As Joanna's example makes clear, when a relationship exists in the material form of clothing it cannot be ignored, or merely left to remain unconsidered. Her mother's role of provisioner and aesthetic arbiter leads to the mounting up on piles of unwanted clothing in the store room. The material existence of her mother's love forces Joanna and her husband to deal with, and reconsider Joanna's relationship to her mother. Clothing confronts Joanna with an aspect of her relationship to her mother that she wishes she did not have to confront.

The strategies women adopt, whether clothing is discarded, still worn or stored, serves to maintain, create or reject particular relationships. For example, items of clothing that are borrowed over a long-period of time form part of the constitution and maintenance of a strong friendship bond. However, as the items are not owned by the women when they wear them, each friend is not trying to 'become' the other, but a connectivity is created among the women. Such swaps and borrowing tends to prevail amongst friendship groups, but the life-long mother-daughter relationship is defined, by vertical provisioning. In the early years, women bought almost all of the clothing for their daughters along with providing food, and other material goods, all of which come to form a materialization of the mother's love, through the practice of caring and provisioning. This practice constitutes both mothers and daughters, and in many cases continues to do so as women enter adulthood.

In renegotiating this relationship, women also have to incorporate others into their lives and as such the wardrobe is the locus for multiple, often conflicting, relationships. The fact that women are able to manage this through clothing points to the partial nature of clothing; in very few cases does the acceptance of clothing signify a complete acceptance of the relationship in its totality. Through clothing women are able simultaneously to reject and accept aspects of relationships. In MacFarlane's (1987) sense, women are able to 'choose' which aspects of other people are taken on. This is seen in the distinction between keeping and wearing items of clothing. Theresa is willing to wear the items given to her by her mother, for Joanna the act of keeping items yet choosing not to wear them is a crucial means through which she redefines her relationship to her mother. For Joanna, the items externalize her mother's love, her mother's role as provisioner and as aesthetic judge. She is happy to embrace the two former aspects, but she wishes her husband to occupy the latter. Through not wearing the items, she is able to reject this aspect of the relationship to her mother, yet is still accepting her mother's love. Her mother's role as aesthetic judge would be mobilized by the act of wearing the clothing, and therefore the ways in which clothing externalizes aspects of people or relationships intersect with acts of wearing, and the practices that surround clothing. In contrast, Theresa not only keeps the clothing but also wears the jumpers. Clothing materially constitutes aspects of relationships through its sensuality, when worn Theresa is able to 'take on' something of the wearer. Items of clothing can therefore both embody the former wearer, and the moreover in the act of wearing the item again, Theresa is mobilizing the facets of her mother that it externalizes.

Given that her mother used to wear these items, Theresa's example seems to form a more complete acceptance of the mother-daughter relationship than many of the other examples. However, it is important to see clothing in the context of the relationship as a whole. Theresa accepts and wears the clothing her mother gives her, and still returns unwanted items to her mother. However, in terms of her financial position, other forms of provisioning, emotional support, she is primarily reliant upon her husband, and in other parts of her life negotiates her independence, seen in her 'fun' individual clothing choices. The clothing relationship with her mother is an arena in which she still relies upon her mother's judgments and financial and practical aid, although this is in contrast to the rest of her relationship with her mother. This is something which arises out of almost all of my examples, with the notable exception of Joanna, which is that the relationship as it exists through clothing, is almost always in contrast and often contradictory to other aspects of relationships. In particular relating to autonomy and dependence, clothing was one of the few arenas in which this is present; as it is not verbalized it becomes an acceptable domain through which women can retain an aspect of dependence upon their mothers. This is seen similarly in the case of the shared friendship through clothing, where issues of status were present in clothing yet did not appear to be elsewhere. Given the multiple strategies available through clothing it is therefore possible for such contradictions to be present. A relationship through clothing is rarely entirely consistent, but instead it is complementary to other aspects of the relationship. Theresa's 'fun' clothing as an individual choice contradicts her partial dependence upon her mother through clothing. However, these contradictory aspects

balance each other, and form an example of Strathern's argument (1992) for the complementarity between individuality and kinship.

Relationships are a negotiated process; such relationships are not separate to a self that exists through clothing. Explored in this chapter is the possibility that women 'dress' themselves in relationships. This is not just metaphoric, as relationships are externalized in the items of clothing that hang in the wardrobe, so that women are literally dressing in relationships as a means of extending the potentials of the self. For examples, when Lisa, Sandra or Jane borrow one of Lizzie's tops, they are trying on Lizzie's attributes as 'cool' or fashionable, as externalized in the clothing, in order to see whether they can be this type of person, whether, on wearing the top, they can live up to it. For the girls in the house this is an experimentation through both trying on the tops, or wearing them on occasions. Yet for Theresa the trying on of the attributes of her mother is more long-term, as through wearing them she is attempting to assimilate these into her own position as a mother.

Whilst this is an expansion of the self, similarly dressing in relationships may also involve the closing off and delimiting of the self. Discussed in the chapter on personal aesthetics was the possibility that clothing may externalize the intentionality of the wearer. This attempt to influence others through clothing is often impeded by the materiality of the clothing and the expectations of others. Yet in this chapter this process is made even more complicated than women choosing an item in an attempt to influence the opinions of others. When wearing gifted clothing, or borrowing the clothing of others,

the intentions of the owner, or the gifter, are present in the item. In Joanna's case, she experiences her mother's intentions through the clothing as a burden and is delimited by her mother's construction of her through clothing. As is characteristic of many other examples over gifted clothing, women have to negotiate a potential discrepancy between their own intentions and those of the gifter. In Joanna's case she is unable to wear the items; this rejection is not just about whether she is rejecting or accepting the relationship with her mother, but also about how she is able to construct herself through the clothing.

The ways in which clothing externalizes the intentions of others in other cases may be mobilized as a positive factor. If clothing is seen to externalize other people, women may be able to become someone they would otherwise have not, through borrowing others' clothing. This is seen most clearly in the case of the girls who swap their clothing. Lizzie buys items for herself in order for other people to see her as 'cool' or 'funky'. When the other girls borrow these same items, they are attempting to mobilize Lizzie's intentions in order to attempt to convince others that they too are 'cool'. In the previous chapter I considered individual self constructions through clothing. Here this has been widened to see how women expand themselves by attaching themselves to specific relationships, in an attempt to construct themselves through the attributes of that person. In the next chapter I will look at how this happens when women experiment with fashion or style, linking themselves to a more general normative sense of the kind of person who would be associated with that item and again trying to be seen as consistent with that.

Chapter 7: Fashion as practice: the burden of rules and the creation of innovation.

The previous chapter situated the wardrobe and getting dressed within women's social networks, and challenged the idea that clothing is a free expression of the 'individual'. Here I will consider this issue in the wider context of the fashion system, from the perspective of the wardrobe. The context of fashion is considered both as an external influence, seen in the magazines women read and the knowledges they acquire, and as new innovations that may emerge from the wardrobe and women's personal aesthetic, all of which in turn impact upon the generation of new fashions. 'Fashion' is therefore understood as a practice, experienced through the moment of dressing as a dilemma or a creative possibility for innovation. This is particularly pertinent given the shift from understandings of fashion as a succession of homogeneous styles to fragmented and contested, as the burden of fashion is shifted to the individual consumer. As fashion pervades all arenas of popular culture, the world of celebrities, sport and even politics, there is an expectation that individuals will be sartorially aware.

In such a context, post-modern accounts position fashion as a domain for free expression, involving 'no rules, only choices' (Ewen and Ewen, cited in Muggleton, 2000). Fashion is seen as offering endless possibilities for individual expression. However, this fails to account for the dominant experiences of dressing within my ethnography, which is the failure to express the self effectively through clothing. Fashion is often therefore experienced not as a free choice, but as an expectation placed upon the individual. The lack of clearly defined homogeneous fashions for many women is not experienced as

liberating, but as a constraint. As such, the 'choices' often made in such moments of anxiety are extremely conformist as women fall back on items they 'know' how to wear. As became apparent in Chapter 4, on the wardrobe as personal aesthetics, women have their own rules of which items 'go' together, which govern how dressing takes place. To be introduced here is how women use the external guidance of fashion magazines, television programmes and books, to facilitate the creation of outfits from the wardrobe.

The focus of this chapter is both how women mediate potential panics through such 'rules' and also how fashion may be seen as a creative potential for individuals. The innovation and creativity of fashion coexists with, and is dependent upon, conformist and rule-bound choices made by the majority of women. As Simmel (1971) pointed out, a key characteristic of fashion is the perpetual and unresolved tension between individuality and conformity. This chapter will take the logic observed by Simmel to its empirical conclusions, and understand it as a tension played out within the act of dressing. Fashion requires innovators, who create new looks, which, in order to be defined as 'fashion', have to be taken up by the wider population. The source of innovation to be considered here is not defined as a top-down prescription by fashion magazines, but rather as it arises organically from the wardrobe. In contrast, I will look at conformity through external influences of fashion and the 'rules' of clothing, taking the specific example of the television programme and book 'What not to Wear'.

Fashion as context:

As a context for dressing, fashion is not understood here as an external imposition which affects all women in the same manner, but seen in terms of how it intersects with the 'internal' orders of the wardrobe, and women's unique biographies. Almost all women I worked with were able to trace their lives in terms of a series of fashions or 'looks' in which they participated, or remembered others wearing. These remembrances position fashion in terms of a series of separate and distinct fashions which succeeded each other. Such conformist participation and subsequent u-turn rejections, as each look replaces the former, are characteristic of younger age-groups, primarily teenagers. The majority of women I interviewed were over the age of 20, and a characteristic response was the complete disavowal of subscribing to what is in fashion. For example, Rosanna, now in her late 20s, gasps with horror as she recalls the looks of her teenage years, and now prefers to shop in charity shops, eschewing the high-street shops, which she equates with fashion victims. Whilst in her teenage years she participated in a fleeting series of fashions, Goth, Hippy, and Punk, all of which are explicit counter-cultural looks. Such repudiation of the mainstream that inheres within sub-cultural looks coincides with teenage rebellion, fickleness and lack of permanence of identity. Now she states that whilst she still maintains an interest in fashion, always knowing what is happening on the catwalks, she would never buy into one whole look. Referring to the current 80s revival she states "I don't like strong trends...I like some aspects of it, but I think it's nice to take bits of it and integrate it into what you like, but when you see people who've got the whole look - it's like being a teenager when you haven't got your own identity so you just use someone else's". Such a disavowal of complete adherence to a look here forms a

signifier of Rosanna's own claims to maturity, the capacity to compromise and recombine diverse facets of clothing. Her participation in fashion is more partial and situated.

Rosanna's example shows a transition from homogeneous involvement in styles, to a negotiated participation, as items are gradually introduced into pre-existing personal aesthetics. Such a progression is indicative of wider shifts in the fashion system. As will be demonstrated, an understanding of 'fashion' as emerging from the wardrobe is extremely different from the 'fashion' that is presented in magazines. Despite the existence of bi-annual fashion shows in the 4 fashion capitals (New York, London, Milan, Paris), fashions are far more rapidly changing and ephemeral than a twice yearly shift. Emphasis now falls upon the multiple domains of fashion (White and Griffiths, 2000): magazines, retail outlets, designers, street-style, celebrities, and consumers. These domains exist within the overall fashion system as overlapping discursive arenas (Foucault, 1980) for the production of ideals, meanings and knowledge about fashion; they are also multiple sites for the production, negotiation and interpretation of fashion knowledge. Multiple agents are involved in this production (Entwistle, 2000), all defining what is fashionable. Buyers buy certain clothes; magazine journalists define certain items as being fashionable and celebrities chose to favour certain designers. Along with this change, comes the shift in source of fashion expertise. What was once a domain dominated by magazine journalists (Barthes, 1985) is now also the realm of media personalities.

As many high street retail outlets, such as Zara, Top Shop and H and M, acquire new stock every 6 weeks, the shelf-life of items of clothing becomes even briefer as the quantities of goods escalate. As a consequence there is no single definition of what is in fashion at any given time; within any one season seemingly contrasting looks are 'in fashion'. In effect, as such rapid turnover of styles shows there is no longer such a thing as 'fashion' across the board as the notion of a range of homogenized styles has disappeared. As fashion seeps into so many arenas of contemporary life, with every media event becoming a fashion event, fashion is no longer a separate domain, with David Beckham's sartorial habits making the front-page of the tabloids and, even in politics, the era of spin and image has lead to a greater importance in individual's ability to interpret appearances. Individuals are expected to be able to interpret appearances, and present themselves in an adequate manner, yet in such a climate of multiple fashions and styles, the basis for making such claims is increasingly insecure. The diversity of potential styles available and equally, the emphasis on innovation coming from street style, rather than being imposed from above (McRobbie, 1994), offer many possibilities to the individual. Yet on the other hand this offers the potential for failure. The immense anxiety ensuing from assembling a single item for an important event dominated my fieldwork. The instance discussed in Chapter 5 of Louise, who was sleepless with worry over what to wear to her friend's birthday. She felt unable even to wear her 'safe' items, and ultimately came to feel alienated from the very contents of her own wardrobe. Her panic compelled her to take out a Top Shop store card, in order to buy another pair of jeans, despite her impoverished state. The examples of women who have wardrobes spilling over with clothes yet are still unable to make a selection are too numerous to

delineate here. Such indecision is clearly not solely a result of concerns over fashion, but an example of how the shifting uncertain domain of fashion intersects with broader social expectations.

In Louise's case, the new item she ends up buying is a pair of jeans (despite already having numerous pairs), albeit in a slightly more 'fashionable' style, cropped with buckles round the bottom. In buying a single new purchase, the item had to 'go' with the tops she already possessed in her wardrobe. As she already possesses an array of denim jeans, denim is seen to have a high combinational potential, as the fashionable element is incorporated in the details. This example is characteristic of many women I interviewed, who are keen to look 'funky' yet not to subscribe to a total look. The way in which Louise chose to select the item and then make the purchase, arises out of the pre-existing orders of her wardrobe. The chapter on the wardrobe as a personal aesthetic focused upon the nature of such ordering, and the ways in which women categorise their wardrobes, present in the moment when women ask 'does this go?' What Louise's example makes apparent is that the internal orders of the wardrobe affect how women are able to incorporate new items.

Another facet to be considered in this chapter is the way in which innovation is generated, how this is possible in the context of such defined orders. The sense of novelty, and of escaping the confines of a clearly defined personal aesthetic, is a central component of what fashion is. In the light of the earlier discussion, fashion is concerned with assemblage, rather than just wearing particular fashion items. What matters is how

the items are combined. The importance of the ways in which items are put together gives rise to an understanding of fashion as involving particular situated knowledges regarding sartorial expectations. Rather than confining these knowledges to what items are in fashion, they involve wider cultural knowledges (Entwistle, 2000, Goffman, 1971 and Mauss, 1973). Such competences involve the awareness of social appropriateness, relating to age, the particular locations the woman is going to. Through an ethnographic approach, the individuals who participate in fashion are understood as grounded individuals. Furthermore the innovations are understood as arising out of the preexisting wardrobe, not imposed from outside. Arising out of my ethnography is a different definition of fashion: not in terms of externally imposed 'looks', but as the individual's burden of assemblage and, for innovators, as the creative interpretation of possibilities.

However, fashion can never just be about the individual: if only one person wears an innovative original style, it only becomes a fashion once this look is adopted by a range of other people. This chapter is based primarily upon how innovation arises out of individuals' wardrobes, yet it is worth mentioning briefly here how such innovatory looks catch on. In the previous chapter on relationships, the example was given of a group of 4 girls living together, who regularly swapped clothing. One of the girls, Lizzie is the innovator of the house, as she introduces a new style, which the others tentatively try out for themselves. In the more conservative cases, such as Jane, she remains at the level of borrowing. However, once Lisa is accustomed to a new style she will often purchase a similar item for herself. On some levels the house works like a microcosm of 'fashion' more widely, demonstrating the tensions Simmel pointed to between individuality and

conformity. The fashion 'leader' breaks out from the ordinary way of dressing, introducing a different and unique item, once the others become used to such an item, they gradually introduce it into their own wardrobes until the item is common through out the house, and the cycle of novelty recommences. As the 'coolest' member of the house, being slightly more confident and less conformist with her clothing, Lizzie is the innovator. Living in a house together they are constantly exposed to each other's clothing and the new style at first seeming alien becomes naturalized. In these cases innovation and ideas do not come from magazines, and are therefore not defined externally, but rather develop organically through their friendship group.

Predefined orders; 'the rules' of fashion:

The fashion system is the context for this research, and the particular effects this produces have been discussed both here and elsewhere, relating to the immensity of choice through fluctuating fashions, and the shifting sands of fashion expertise. Current understandings of the fashion context see this 'system' not as an overarching determinist system imposed on passive consumers, but as fragmented and contested (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001). A central area which is the focus of attention is how knowledges about fashion are produced, which is empirically evident in textual analyses of fashion magazines and the images of fashion (Buckley and Gundle, 2000, Evans, 2000). Particularly problematic are the ways in which the images therein come to be the reality of fashion. Barthes (1985: vi) sees magazines as constitutive of fashion: there are no 'real' clothes which precede this discourse of fashion. This thesis aims to reconcile the structuralist principles of understanding individual items of clothing from the totality of

the wardrobe with an understanding of the particular material propensities of clothing as agentic in constructing the self. My ethnography also moves the focus from image to practice, from textual to wearing. Such fashion oriented magazines do proliferate, such as *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Company*, *Red*, *In Style*, and even celebrity magazines such as *Heat*, *OK*, *Hello*, *New*, *Now* and *Closer* which contain fashion sections. The focus of this thesis is not the textual, nor 'fashion', but rather the clothing in the wardrobe. However in order to understand this context more fully, I will briefly consider the nature of one such magazine, *In Style*, and a best-selling fashion advice book *What Not To Wear*, with a corresponding television programme. The magazine is one which several of my interviewees profess to reading, in particular two sisters Patsy and Theresa who will be considered later, and is thus useful in explicating their particular sartorial practices. The television programme is one which almost all of my informants were familiar with, many watching it avidly. Both women show a similar orientation to clothing, and the importance of fixed rules of dressing. This fixity is important in resolving the uncertainties produced by the fickle shifts of fashion and lack of definitive experts. These fixed rules are constitutive of the 'complementarity of goods' McCracken (1988), wherein certain items are perceived to 'go' together. Such rules in fact form the basis for 'rule breaking' which is one of the forms of the development of innovation in fashion which will be considered later.

In Style is a monthly women's magazine which focuses almost exclusively upon clothes and fashion (this is unusual as most other magazines have large sections on relationships and sex) and the sub-title of the magazine is 'your own personal stylist'. Despite being a

mass-produced, generic style magazine, there is an attempt to individualise the magazine for the reader. As will become apparent, this process of personalisation takes place through considerations of body shapes, and colour co-ordination. The adverts for the magazine are present on the London Underground Trains, forming part of the visual landscape of the everyday journey in the city. The adverts are posted in the area above the seating, looking much like a Dulux colour chart, with blocks of colour or patterns covering the advert. Underneath each block of colour is a corresponding clothing rule, such as 'vertical stripes elongate short legs' or 'turquoise compliments a tan'. The premise being that if you stick to the 'rules' you will end up by wearing clothing that suit you and end up looking and feeling fantastic. These principles are manifest in the actual magazine. For example, there is a section within the magazine entitled 'Style file: assessment management' (March, 2004: 51-4), which in this edition focuses upon the skirt, and discusses three types of skirt (pencil, mini and circle) and offers guidance on which body shapes are able to wear them, and how they should be worn. Taking the specific example of the pencil skirt (March 2004:52), 3 possible outfits are pictured, all centring upon different examples of the pencil skirt. Running down the centre of the page is an outline of who should wear it ('fuller frames'), who shouldn't wear it ('narrow, straight up-and-down frames'). Below these is advice on how to wear it which corresponds not only to body shapes but also linked into particular fashions or styles. For a 40s look the reader is advised to team the skirt with 'chiffon or satin camisole tops' and a heel that adds 'definition to the leg'. The rules here centre upon how the different shapes and styles of one item flatter different body shapes. Furthermore instructions upon how combinations should be made are given, linking what is seen to suit a particular

shape with a particular style (as generated through combinations). Women are expected to be able to read off what to wear from correlating their body shape with those described. As will become apparent through my ethnography such rules are both restrictive and enabling.

The 'rules' of clothing, with body shape being the crucial determinant, are also present in the immensely popular television programme 'What Not To Wear' presented by two fashion journalists-turned-stylists to ordinary people, Trinny and Suzannah. With only a couple of exceptions, all the women I worked with were familiar with the programme, many also possessing the accompanying book. Unlike *In Style* magazine, however, the stance taken by this programme is in fact quite anti-fashion. On the television programme each week a member of the public, having been secretly nominated by their friends or relatives for having terrible dress sense, has Trinny and Suzannah sprung upon them and are offered £2000 to buy a new wardrobe. The condition of this being that they obey Trinny and Suzannah's fashion 'rules'. The process begins with a humiliating encounter of themselves naked in a mirrored room, whilst the two women prod and poke at their victims flabby bits. The person then has to try on one of their favourite outfits (which indubitably the stylists hate) in front of the aforementioned mirror, only to be scoffed at by Trinny and Suzannah for looking fat or flat chested, or whatever this particular women's 'problem area' is supposed to be. They are then cheered up by being told what 'rules' they should follow to flatter their shape, and sent off to spend £2000, with various interventions from Trinny and Suzannah. The end result is invariably a delighted transformation, and the woman becomes a convert to 'the rules'.

The book involves a delineation of these rules; the overall principle being to educate women to dress to 'show off what you love and hiding what you loathe about your body' (Constantine and Woodall, 2002: 7). Dressing is presented as an act of 'disguise' (ibid, 2002:8), of wearing clothes to suit a particular body shape. The book ends with a directory of suitable shops, containing 10 chapters prior to this which each focus upon a particular physical defect, such as 'big tits', 'no waist', 'short legs' and so on. Each chapter follows the same structure; for example the 'Big Arms' section (ibid, 2002: 40-51) opens with a photo of Suzannah naked frowning at her allegedly huge arms, facing the dilemma of what is 'the owner of plucked chicken wings supposed to wear in the summer?' Throughout the rest of the chapter there are a selection of items of clothing with a photo of her wearing the 'worst' example and beaming wearing the 'best item'. Under the example of each is given a reason such as cap sleeves being bad as 'on big arms these look like a stretched swimming cap atop a mountain of flesh' (ibid, 2002: 42). Following these is a list of outlets at which to shop if you are cursed with large arms, and on the very final page (ibid, 2002: 51) is a list of the 'golden rules for big arms'. Such as: 'Fat arms must always wear sleeves' or 'small prints cover a multitude of flabby flesh'.

In common with *In Style*, the focus is upon body shapes and how the evils of the flesh may be concealed; therefore dressing becomes an act of deception. Similar principles are also laid out in each, forming a guidebook full of rules for the confused shopper. Notably absent from either example is the sense in which clothing may be about biography or the idiosyncrasies of personal preferences; whilst allegedly offering a personalised service,

all semblance of personality is divorced out from 'the rules'. Whilst most women were familiar with both of these examples, Patsy and Theresa bought the magazine monthly, and Patsy possesses the 'What Not To Wear' book. There is an interesting correspondence between the ways in which these women dress and the rules presented above showing both the safety such rules offer but also their limitations. Although both women dress very differently, they both possess similar rule bound principles which govern their choices, based upon what colours suit them and what their body shape is.

Patsy is in her early 30s, lives alone in Chelsea and is passionate about clothing, popping into the shops daily for at least a brief familiarization with available stock. She works in PR for a large corporate agency. Although there is no formal dress code, as she is constantly in contact with important clients there are certain expectations regarding what is suitable attire. Patsy tends to favour her knee high fabric black or brown boots, a knee length A-line skirt, in denim or perhaps black, and a white shirt, or pale pink or blue polo-neck. Patsy confesses that a large degree of her sartorial preferences arise out of her perception of her body shape, feeling she is disproportionately large around the hips. The effect of an A-line skirt is to cling to the hips, yet as the skirt lengthens the shape triangulates out, balancing out the size of her hips. There is a greater circumference of material around her knees, making her hips look correspondingly smaller. Similarly she usually selects darker colour skirts, with a paler top, as the eye is caught by the lightness of the top, the skirt and her hips recede in importance. Especially in the darker winter months, the matching darkness of the skirt moves the emphasis away from the precise boundaries of where the skirt terminates. Patsy owns very few pairs of trousers or jeans.

She talks with despondent longing of finding a perfect pair of jeans, loving the style, yet feeling too self-conscious to wear them, as they delineate the precise size and shape of her legs. She does wear her parallel-line black trousers when meeting her friends for drinks, because here the fabric hangs vertically from the hips, not following the contours of the legs, and therefore minimizing the appearance of the upper legs. She admits she wishes she could wear jeans, as wearing a skirt or black trousers, she feels self-conscious as her friends comment upon how smart she looks. However Patsy is rigid about what shapes she can and cannot wear. Similarly with colours, she loves to wear khaki green or baby pink as they accentuate and compliment her blonde hair.

Theresa, Patsy's elder sister, does like to wear nice clothes, yet she is less passionate than Patsy, and is less confident in choosing successful outfits. Spending most days at home with her two young children, the salient sartorial division of her day is into more practically oriented day wear, and then different clothes when she changes for dinner with her husband, on his return from work. Theresa possesses vast amounts of jeans, and tends to use them both as day-wear, and combined with a smarter top in the evening. Such a dominance of denim within her wardrobe is extremely common, and will be discussed in more depth in the chapter in habitual wear and event wear. However this constant wearing of denim, when seen in the other characteristics of Theresa's wardrobe is particularly telling. The vast majority of Theresa's clothes are gifts, Not only does this reflect Theresa's practicality and abhorrence of waste, but also means that when an item is bought for her or given to her, the necessity for her making a selection is no longer present. The decision is often already made for her, as her friends and relative make the

selection for her. Her mother-in-law regularly buys Theresa clothing, as does her mother and several of her friends. Although Theresa often professes a desire to wear slightly fashionable clothing, which breaks out of her ordinary aesthetic, she is concerned with looking good, and often falls back on her ordinary aesthetic. Although she does possess a vast array of jeans, they all have slight variations in the patterns upon them, some with embroidery, some with silver or pink glitter adorning the lower legs. In the details Theresa feels she can experiment with fashion.

Ordinarily she is quite reluctant to make new purchases, or purchases which fall outside her usual defined aesthetic. Last summer Theresa was invited to a ball with her husband, and bought a new dress for the occasion, a black cap-sleeved dress, which, having two layers of fabric, clings to the outline of the body, reaching her ankles. The dilemma for Theresa came when considering which shoes would complete the outfit; having not attended such an event for quite a while she has become unaccustomed to making such decisions. Given the length of the dress, she decided high heels would be most appropriate. When I first spoke to her about it, she had decided she was going to wear a pair of shoes she had had since she was 18 (she is now in her mid-30s); the shoes were court shoes (closed heel and toe, with no buckles or straps) made of black velvet, with a 1 ½ inch heel rounded like a cone. The colour, and lack of adornment seems to set them outside of the parameters of being fashion shoes, and leads Theresa to define them as a 'classic', feeling that they would compliment the traditional style of the dress. Although she has a hankering for something new, Theresa's few smart shoes are all in this court shoe style, with the characteristic cone heel.

On a shopping trip prior to the ball, Theresa chances to be shopping in Top Shop, including a brief perusal in the shoe section, which at the time was dominated by shoes with extremely pointy toes. The prevalence of such styles of shoes gives Theresa time to think that she would quite like some 'trendy' shoes, and she ends up trying a pair on. They are black with a covered toe that draws into a point after the toes, and are perched on a 2 ½ inch stiletto heel, with a strap surrounding her ankles. When she first tried them on, and looked down at her feet, she was struck by how pointy her toes looked, exclaiming she looked like a 'witch'. However, on looking sideways in the mirror, and in discussion with the shop assistant, Theresa conceded, with surprise, how nice they looked, tailoring the shape of her foot. Having purchased the shoes, she tries them on with the dress in front of the mirror, and feels reassured as she becomes accustomed to the novel style; she also feels slightly fashionable in them, having modernised her look. Her primary concern then becomes whether she will be able to stand in the shoes, as her children shriek with perversely amused delight: "mummy you'll fall over when you dance!" Her concerns proved unfounded, and she now plans to wear the shoes to another event.

Through this we see Theresa's desire to 'play safe', wearing 'classic' clothes that she considers stylish, yet she simultaneously wants to have fun with the clothing, and have a slightly more fashionable edge. On this occasion she successfully managed to balance the two. Often the ways in which Theresa makes new purchases is through guidance from other sources. When she still lived near her sister in London, she would often persuade

Patsy to meet her in a shop at lunchtime to just check if an outfit is suitable for her. Theresa also uses magazines as an explicit guide to how she may make her purchases; regularly buying *In Style* magazine, she looks through for ideas. When she sees an item she likes, such as on one instance she saw a suedette camel coloured, collarless jacket, she rings up the retail outlet to see if the item is in stock, and then makes a trip to the shop to try it on. The magazines thus explicitly mediate Theresa's wardrobe and the outside world of fashion, giving her guidance on what to wear and what is fashionable. In analyzing the format of a particular magazine and fashion programme and then these two sisters, I am not trying to suggest that the women passively consume what the magazine tells them. Rather there is a convergence of attitudes to clothing: both women are rule-governed in terms of their clothing, being particularly keen to wear clothing that suits them, and often not deviating from the rules. Such an attitude is one that is cultivated throughout their life, their mother being someone who rigorously divides up her wardrobe, and many of her habits of ordering the wardrobe are present in Theresa's and Patsy's wardrobes. Almost all women I interviewed had a similar sense of wanting to wear what suited them. However, often this is not reflected in the clothes they wear as they tend instead to buy clothing that they like, rather than being governed by the rules of what they 'should' wear for their body shapes. Both women show a deviation from this rule-bounded-ness, in that the issues of biography, or relationships, often play a major part in which selections are made. Patsy often wears lighter tops, or pale-pink, not solely as it is 'her colour' but because it makes her feel more optimistic and brighter. The lightness of the colour has an agentic effect in lifting her mood. The limitations of such

rule bound approaches fail to explicate the complexities of women's clothing practices in divorcing them from all aspects of personality or biography.

Breaking of rules: making of fashions:

Such rules are omni-present, and show clearly that this is a way in which people may orient themselves and they are also conversely important in accounting for how innovation may arise. Theresa's example of the buying of new shoes, shows how a small change was incorporated into her wardrobe. Here I will consider how innovative looks and fashions may be created. The individuals to be considered here have their own clothing rules of 'what goes', yet in creating new looks, break these very rules, as well as official style rules. Helen is an aspiring fashion designer, having just finished an MA in fashion design in Nottingham. Originally she comes from Londonderry in Northern Ireland, where the shopping landscape consists of a sparse collection of high street shops and "fashions catch on there about 9 months after you get them here in Nottingham". Having moved to Nottingham 4 years ago, feeling the pressures of being a fashion student, being in a location she felt to be more "edgy" than her home town, Helen rapidly bought new clothes, adopting what she terms a "funky, street" look. Now married, a graduate, and working a couple of days a week in Flannels (an exclusive boutique in Nottingham that supplies a range of top designer clothes), she has adopted a more "settled, stylish" look. She is determined not to dress like a "fashion victim". For example before she moved to Nottingham she bought a knee length checked skirt, with a beige background, with green and red alternating crossing lines across the skirt. Whilst this was bought in an anonymous shop in Dublin, the pattern is one which at a glance

looks like the trademark Burberry print. This particular fabric and style has become omni-present in the last few years, in particular on handbags, and has become a signifier of the mindless fashion victim. Helen no longer wears her skirt, dreading the thought that if she did, everyone would think she was a “Burberry wannabe”, rather than the innovator she perceives herself to be.

However, simultaneously, she pays heed to and wants to coincide with what is in fashion. On one wardrobe interview, in a pile of discarded clothes at the bottom of her wardrobe, Helen unearthed a short fitted dress, with spaghetti straps, the under-layer consisting of black and white swirls, and a thin black gauze layer on top. Purchased by her then boyfriend (now her husband) to wear at one of her fashion shows, she has not worn it recently. In light of the incipient current trend towards monochrome on the high street at the moment of the interview, Helen reconsiders the dress, and moves it back to the upper part of her wardrobe. She plans to wear it over a pair of trousers, recognizing the particular fashion yet adding her own interpretation to it. She is keen to look slightly different, but within the parameters of her own aesthetic. As a person Helen is extremely logical, methodical and practical and the kind of creativity she possesses is less of the inspired erratic form (as most other fashion designers claim to be) but is rather more reasoned and ordered. When selecting outfits to wear she professes to “wear pieces that everyone else might have in their wardrobe but I like to wear them in a different way”. The innovatory look is created through the way in which items are put together or the manner in which they are worn.

In the prior discussions of Theresa and Patsy, it becomes apparent that both women aspire to possessing a clearly defined sense of 'what goes', something symptomatic of every single woman I worked with. Such an aesthetic is never fixed, as seen in the key questions which dominated my fieldwork "does this go?" women are clearly unsure. Women such as Theresa and Patsy are more typical of those I interviewed than the two case studies of Helen and Alice. Such women are atypical, but signify the important group of innovators who by definition have to be the minority. McCracken refers to the 'complementarity of goods' (1988), where the colours, textures and styles of the clothing are perceived to determine which combinations can be made. A crucial part of this is that this sense of aesthetic order entails equally which items cannot be combined; however it is through the creation of new nodules of clothing, and breaking away from preordained 'rules' that innovation is generated. For Helen, her innovations are generated by her own personal aesthetic. She has a clearly defined sense of what goes, which is extremely sensitive at times. Like Patsy and Theresa, she still possesses many key 'safe' items which 'go' with most things.

Despite having these clearly defined aesthetic rules, Helen is keen to make herself look slightly different, yet achieves this from within these very parameters. One of the ways in which she manages this is through the purchase of "multi-purpose tops". She has a number of such items. For example, on a recent excursion to York she visited the Liberty sale shop. One of the items she bought was a $\frac{3}{4}$ length shirt dress shown on the photograph below and is in a typical Liberty's style print, bold swirls of contrasting colours, in this instance fuchsia, red, pale blue and beige.



Photo 13: Helen's Liberty print dress

Whilst the print is recognizable as Liberty's, it moves beyond a more standard bold floral print to a more edgy psychedelic look. Helen has worn the dress already to her friend's housewarming party, fastened up and belted, with a pair of turquoise sandals and her favourite Girbaud jeans. Girbaud is a French label that specializes in unusually styled denim, and is a particular favourite of Helen's. These jeans are demarcated as different through the absence of a waistband, deep reaching pockets at either side and in the lower half of each leg there is a pleat at the front, which conceals a fold of extra fabric. When Helen walks, the pleats are opened, liberating the excess of fabric which envelopes her ankles.

On the occasion of wearing the dress over the jeans the folds of denim – alternately revealed and concealed - were the only visible part of the jeans. The “funky, street” look of the jeans further challenges the traditional floral Liberty's look; here through combination, a funky unusual look is created. Rather than combining the Liberty's dress with a smart pair of shoes and matching handbag, Helen draws upon the more subversive aspects of the fabric, such as the substitutability of vibrant colours, and further enhances this through wearing baggy jeans which instead of having a seam at the bottom are torn into shreds, white threads hanging from them. Rather than feeling tyrannized by the Liberty's dress, and the combinations this seems to compel, Helen has the confidence to assert her own combinations. Not only does she have the confidence not to be intimidated by the dress itself, she tames it to her personal tastes. The dress speaks to multiple orders dependent upon how it is combined: the settled staid look, but equally it has within it the potential for mild subversion. The latter element is matched by an item from the ‘funky’

order of Helen's wardrobes, creating a new aesthetic logic. What is apparent here is that through novel combination an innovative look is created. The combination flouts the expected way in which the dress would be worn, whilst simultaneously creating a new logic which is implicit within the clothing itself already.

Moreover this dress is a multi-purpose item. Helen has thus far worn it as a dress over jeans, as described above and as a conventional dress (with nothing worn under it). However, what attracted her to buying it was the potential she saw in it; she anticipates wearing it opened, like a coat, over a top and trousers. Alternatively she may shorten it to make it more like a longer shirt, or sew in elastic along one side, so the material is ruched up one side of the leg. She has yet to decide what alterations, if any, she will make. Buying items which she feels she will be able to wear in many ways is something typical of Helen and she possesses many tops which double up as dresses, which can be worn off-the-shoulder for a sexier look, or buttoned up for a more "settled" look. Within this category fall her four scarves (also bought in the Liberty sale shop): she loves the "possibilities" of a scarf, worn as a scarf, as a shawl, as a top tied around her body. Characteristic of such multi-functional tops is that the type of item it is and the social expectations of how it is worn, do not confine Helen's choices as to how it is worn. Rather, she is aware of the ways in which the item should be worn, and seeks to wear it slightly differently.

An aspect of this is that, as a future fashion designer, she often buys clothes and makes alterations to them. For example she has a white long sleeved open knit jumper from

Hennes, which when she first purchased it she wore constantly for the first 2 months with a lilac bra underneath or vest top. However, such perpetual wearing and washing has led to a loosening of the shape, and the top no longer fits to the body, and at the cuffs and lower seams it has become misshapen. Determined not to be defeated by the dilapidation of the jumper, she has started to thread ribbons through the open weave around the cuffs and the hem. Once finished, the jumper will be reshaped as it fits more tightly around the waist, and the cuffs. The reason behind the alterations in this case was both practical necessity and as she was “fed up with it” and doesn’t “enjoy wearing it anymore”. Here a new look is created as slight modifications are made to the item to give it a slight edge.

Eclecticism as the generation of fashions:

Helen draws from her pre-existing personal aesthetic in order to generate innovation through either slight modifications to the clothing or slightly unusual combinations. My next example, Alice, is a similarly positioned woman, in her early 20s, a former fashion student living in Nottingham. Whilst Helen is conscious of the standard combinations that are made, and seeks to move slightly beyond this, Alice’s style is far more edgy. Her acts of assemblage and the generation of innovative looks can be seen in part as the demolition of pre-existing clothing ‘rules’. Such a position arises out of her socialisation into particular clothing taxonomies and adamant desire to look different. Alice’s wardrobe is unlike any other I excavated; the colours of the clothing are kaleidoscopic, many items of clothing being in the most unusual prints. More notable is the almost complete absence of black. Such a love of colour and dramatic prints is something Alice has always possessed. Whilst her mother dressed in quite a conservative stylish way, her

father was, and is, an extremely extravagant dresser. His latest purchase is a yellow suit, with blue and white pinstripes, worn with his favourite straw boater, and sandals. Not only was he passionate about colour and dramatic clothing, he had no interest in assemblage, or what items 'go' together but rather threw together an eclectic mass of his favourite items of the moment into one outfit. Similarly her elder sister has such an attitude to clothing, loving prints and colours, and later went on to study textiles at university. As a young girl she was given her elder sister's hand-me-downs, and was therefore materially incorporated into this aesthetic. Even now the two sisters regularly swap clothing, as Alice's wardrobe extends to their home in London. Alice grew up in an environment where wearing attention grabbing, striking clothing was the norm. Moreover as her father paid no heed to 'rules' of what colours or styles he ought to wear together, Alice and her sister's clothing styles similarly developed into seeing all clothing owned as possible combinations, rather than constraining rules.

Rather than this signifying the absence of order in Alice's wardrobe, it has developed in a particular and unique way. When discussing what she wears with her only black dress, she points at her red shoes, or green and gold shoes, stating that she couldn't wear black shoes as "black doesn't go with black. It'd near enough kill me!" Here there is a clear sense of aesthetic ordering, it is just slightly unconventional. Alice does possess "staples" in her wardrobe: denim jacket, smart trousers, jeans, denim skirt, white shirt, white t-shirt, one-colour boob tubes. All these items are crucial parts in the total assemblages she makes, items which have high combinational potential. Similarly she has "fall-back" items: clothing which, no matter how many failed items are tried on, will always work.

For most women I interviewed such items are a pair of jeans, or something relatively plain. Alice's item, shown on the photograph below exemplifies one of the ways in which she manages to dress in a distinctive way, through the possession of bold, unusually printed single items.



Photo 14: Alice's 'fall-back' dress

Whilst Alice does wear a great deal of denim, her current fail-safe item is the dress depicted above: a knee length, short sleeved jersey dress, that hangs very loosely from the body. The dress thus lacks any shape definition, only clinging to the shoulders, then falling in loose folds; there is an optional tie at the waist, in order to provide structure. As is not apparent from the photograph, the dress is almost backless with a couple of horizontal strips of fabric traversing the back. The reason Alice adores the so much is as a result of the vibrant print; she loves the way the stripes work in order to create particular effects. For example, as seen around the waist area, a thick band of diagonal stripes forms a contrast to the predominantly horizontal stripes of the rest of the dress. Through the pattern a waist is created and defined, rather than shape being created through form. Here not only does the print draw attention to the wearer, but also in subtle ways, it alters the form of the dress, which in this case is almost formless and through the patterning the waist becomes defined and reduced.

Whilst this item is eye-catching in itself, just as important is the way in which Alice wears it. Casually she wears it over jeans with a vest underneath. On one instance in the evening she wore it with her “tacky gold sandals” from New Look, with luminous pink nail varnish, with her hair in a mullet style, encouraged into this by her elder sister; “it looked so trashy, a little bit crazy”. She thinks of it as one of her sexiest outfits. Many of her friends have tried it on, and find the dress too baggy and unflattering, yet the way in which form is created through pattern and the subtle revealing of the back, forms part of Alice’s alternative understanding of sexuality. Given that Alice actively wants to look different and unlike anyone else, as she is on a limited budget, and lives in Nottingham

where there not an extensive range of alternative clothes outlets, she has to combine clothing in unexpected ways in order to generate the individual looks she so craves.

In selecting outfits, Alice explicitly aims to wear clothing that will make her stand out and look different. As is apparent from her socialisation into clothing, such peculiar combinations are in part also naturalised to her. In considering the moments when Alice actively cultivates this look of uniqueness, the importance of breaking rules becomes apparent. Last summer she was invited to a ball; not really being a “ball-y person” Alice possessed no suitable dresses already. She was clearly aware of the convention of such occasions when women are expected to buy a new dress, tending towards the excessive and glamorous. For the ball, she wore an A-line floor length skirt – which skimmed the hips and then, as the material was structured, fell in a rigid hoop around Alice’s ankles. The style is similar to that of a traditional ball gown. However, the skirt was made of denim. Here the ‘rule’ being broken is that of the social conventions of place and occasion. On the top half she wore a “raunchy” backless shimmery gold top. Although denim is becoming increasingly acceptable for non-casual occasions, the combination is unexpected, especially when seen in the context of wearing. Alice did not select to wear something totally unacceptable, such as for example a pair of ripped, fraying denim jeans. The shape and form of her skirt was conventional, it is the fabric that is so shocking. Here the innovative is created not by an utter discarding of conventions or fashion rules, but rather from within these very parameters; the conventional becomes subversive.

One of the standard rules championed by Trinny and Suzannah is to never mix patterns (i.e. never wear stripes and spots). Never one to abide by the rules, Alice often break this 'golden rule'. When Alice wears one of her many patterned items, she rarely 'plays safe', but often clashes the two, as seen in a combination she wore recently at her parents' house in London, getting ready with her two sisters, shown on the photograph below:



Photo 15: Alice's rule-breaking outfit.

The combination of the two items in an outfit characterizes the ways in which Alice puts outfits together. It is worth first considering the items separately. The skirt is from French Connection; as is apparent from the photograph the fabric is covered with horizontal stripes. The stripes are not clearly demarcated but rather blend into each other, as the colours are so similar. The material is slightly shimmery, so that where it catches the light the presence of the stripes is negated and the shimmering pink dominates, coming to appear as one colour. A similar soft feminine subtlety is enhanced by the embroidered pattern as the soft colouring and the simplicity of design means it does not dominate the skirt. At times Alice wears the skirt as a top, winding it around her body like a boob tube and tying it up with ribbon, in order to give her look a slight edge. The top, from Oasis, is a brighter pink than the skirt, and the print is far bolder (an exact copy of a Miu Miu print). Despite being floral, the winding stalks off which the flowers emerge are part of the print, and thus the effect is not feminine or girly. However, at the same time, the soft fabric, and the gathered ruffle around the neck gives the bold prints that Alice so loves, a slight feminine twist.

In this outfit she brings together the delicate shimmering, and simple embroidery with the bold, more unconventional femininity of the top. She made the decision to wear this outfit as she has already anticipated that the colours of the two items would match by visualising the successful outfit in her mind. She knew the colours were right and she felt confident to make a combination of patterns that others might consider a little risqué. Although Alice does actively cultivate an eye-catching look, here it is evident that to her the colours and the top and skirt did 'go'. Although she knew the combination would be

considered unconventional, in part the matching of the colours was part of her personal aesthetic. She asserts that she “has a good understanding of colour, that’s why I make those sorts of decisions”. Alice’s eclecticism is a combination of active effort to look ‘different’ and something she has acquired and cultivated throughout her life-course.

Alice then faced a dilemma over what shoes to wear with such a bold combination, and ended up wearing her bright red wedge strappy shoes. The new aesthetic logic created by the combination of the two items seemed to demand an equally bold and clashing choice of shoes. On putting the outfit on, her younger sister exclaimed “what the fuck have you got on! What have you come as?” However, her elder sister reinforced Alice’s decision telling her she looked “really cool”. Alice states that once the clothes were all on, when she looked in the mirror she felt it really matched as an outfit. It was the fact that this outfit was “unusual and risky” that excited her about it. Alice is aware of what other people’s perceptions would be, and when talking about it refers to Trinny and Suzannah who would see such an outfit as an abomination, but Alice’s exasperated response would be “but why can’t you? You can’t have rules, until you put items on you just never know...things start working in different sorts of ways”. Here Alice makes explicit that through making an unlikely combination, a new logic of clothing and ‘what goes’ is created. Only from within the defined parameters of aesthetic ordering, can new fashions be generated. Rather than being confined by the pre-existing logic of the clothing, she enables a new one to be created. The only constraint that Alice does work with is nothing to do with the colours or prints of the clothes themselves, which “don’t scare” her, but is her body shape “if I thought I looked too chunky I wouldn’t wear it”. Even then she does

not follow the 'rules' of what to wear for certain body shapes , seen in the dress where body shape is created without reference to the body but rather from within the surface of form.

Conclusion:

An examination of the practice of fashion through the wardrobe makes apparent that 'fashion' in the sense of homogenized shifts of fashion over time, has largely disappeared. What the examples of Alice and Helen show, is that this has been replaced by the ability to construct an individual look based upon the creative interpretation of possibilities. This burden of the creation of 'individuality' through clothing is now placed on the person, rather than by the dictates of fashion magazines. Indeed the story of the generation of fashions through the wardrobe offers a very different picture from that of official fashion magazines. With each changing fashion season, the looks presented in magazines are seen to change radically, but at the level of practice women do not participate like teenagers in a progression of radically opposed styles. Within magazines, now even within one season, rather than there being only one definitive look that is in fashion, a multiplicity of apparently opposing looks are present. In the context of so many conflicting and confusing options that are presented, the burden then falls on women to create their own eclectic look.

Helen and Alice, as discussed here, are examples of people who are attuned, and have indeed internalized, these possibilities. In Alice's case, she is both consciously attempting to look individual and "not like anyone else" yet simultaneously, this eclecticism is

something she has been practising all her life. As such, fashion does not impact upon the dressing for her as an entirely 'external' influence, but rather becomes fused with her biography. Fashion is therefore situated and interlinked with women's biography and relationships. Alice exemplifies what is defined as currently fashionable practice: she is able to be eclectic, but in an 'individual' way. Rather than the expectation of such individual eclecticism being a moment of panic, both of these women show immense confidence in assembling new looks, as usage is not prescribed by form: a skirt becomes a top as it is worn in a different way. Both women play with possibilities and expectations, through their skills of combination.

Neither women let the logics of clothing define them, seen in the instance of Alice's outfit at the ball, where she wore a denim skirt. She conforms to the expectations of the event through the style of the skirt yet inherent within the same item, through the fabric, is her non-conformity and individuality. In this instance we see Alice's capacity to mobilise the orders of clothing to her will through her confidence and the combination with the gold backless top. As becomes apparent through the analysis of both Helen and Alice, often in upsetting the ordinary complementarity of goods, a new logic is created. When Alice wore the outfit consisting of the patterned top, and stripy skirt, the outfit seemed to compel her to wear contrasting bright red shoes. Once the different combination is made, the aesthetic logic is disrupted and a new coherence is activated. It is as if she would have been letting down her own initial contrasting combination by wearing staid shoes. In order for the outfit to live up to the initial combination, Alice must complete the outfit in an equally bold way. In Helen's case, when she wears the

Liberty's dress, the potentially conflicting aesthetic orders inhere to the same pattern. being both "feminine" and "funky". Through combination, Helen activates the 'funky'. The conflicting complexities within the surface of clothing become apparent. Such potential contradictions are the basis for potential innovations, as the print is inherently unstable. For fashion to be generated, the wearer plays upon such instability, as the orders are shifted within, and mobilized through combinations.

Helen and Alice exemplify what is currently defined as fashionable practice. However, these women were by far the minority within my fieldwork. The experience of most women involves moving away from this burden of trying to be an individual and falling back on 'the rules'. Without exception, every woman I interviewed had a clearly defined sense of 'what goes', understood both as a personal preference, and as a perceived sartorial normativity. This defined aesthetic is a way of mediating panic, as seen in particular in the habitual items that women 'know' how to wear and fall back on. This is the focus of the next chapter. However, this chapter looked at the ways in which women mediate this moment of panic through externally defined 'rules'. In such a shifting uncertain fashion climate, as Theresa's case makes apparent, the existence of fashion rules serves as a stabilising force. Such rules offer an atemporal means of always looking good, in the ephemeral world of fashion. The apparent security they offer is enhanced as they seem to be speaking directly to the particular individuals colouring and body shapes. Whilst Theresa constantly uses such external sources of mediation, Patsy appears to have internalised the rules, as they have become part of her aesthetic, cultivated through a lifetime of adherence. The external rules become interwoven within her unique

biographical progression. What becomes apparent in both these cases is that, even for women who follow Trinny and Suzannah's rules, the apparent personalisation they offer in effect excludes all semblance of personality of individual biography or clothing preferences. Therefore the claim is made that these style rules are individualised, but in practice this offers women help with the burden of looking like an individual, the safeguard of apparently objective rules, to avoid the anxiety of mistakes.

Such apparently timeless rules (as offered by style magazines and guides) seem to contrast with the protean shifts of fashion, merely as a means of dealing with the uncertainties produced by such changes. Whilst Theresa and Patsy both show that the rules become paramount in such a context, what emerges from this ethnography is that rather than being antagonistic poles, in fact rule-boundedness becomes the very domain for the generation of innovatory looks. As such, these 'rules' cover the whole spectrum of fashion practice, and are a crucial pivot in the shifting balance between individuality and conformity. Even the fashion innovators still know these 'rules' and the expectations of what should be worn together, yet this is the very basis of innovation, the rules are there to be broken. However, such women also need to be the minority who are able to manipulate the rules, as by definition the fashion innovators can only be a minority. The fashion artist negates the fashion conformist, as the former is the vanguard of change.

Chapter 8: The Core Division of Wardrobes: 'habitual' and 'non-habitual' clothing:

The women I worked with were not chosen as part of any coherent community, nor based upon any pre-defined social identity. Instead women were selected on the basis of existing in familial and friendship networks. As such, the women I spoke to were diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, financial resources, occupational status, relationships and attitudes to clothing. The decision to select women through such diverse networks in part arises out of the territorially diverse context of my research, where few women live in defined communities, or through enclosed primary identities. As a study into the act of getting dressed, something which every single woman carries out irrespective of position or status, I was interested in what issues emerged as salient. I chose not to access women through established sociological categories such as class, as this would merely presume such factors to be important. Rather than unquestioningly reinforcing such categories, I wanted to see what emerged from my fieldwork, which may well transcend traditional sociological categories, such as ethnicity, class or occupation. This chapter will deal with one such division common to every single woman I worked with, irrespective of age or interest in fashion: the ordering of clothing into habitual and non-habitual. Habitual clothing includes items used to resolve the daily wardrobe dilemma of what to wear; characteristically such items do not require any lengthy thought or deliberation as they are seen as 'easy', facilitating the act of getting dressed. In seeming opposition is 'non-habitual' clothing, often defined by a specific event, which due to its material propensities transforms women both physically and behaviourally (Steele, 2001, Summers, 2001). Rather than this being a simple immutable binary, women manipulate

the two domains; as has been argued earlier in this thesis aspects of the self are externalized in clothing, and thus this manipulation can be seen to form part of this creation and recreation of the self.

One of the major problems women encounter when faced with an array of clothing is that they have to commit to one outfit. The whole wardrobe cannot be worn. As such, the choices offered by the totality of clothing women have in their wardrobes may be experienced as a cause of anxiety. Not only are women faced with the dilemma of what to choose from the wardrobe, yet this occurs in a wider context of seemingly endless opportunities and choices, seen in the wealth of clothing on offer in retail outlets. Such a range of possible identities that hang on the rails in shops would seem to offer to women endless possibilities of who they could be. Life is characterized by apparently infinite choices, with multi-channel television, flexi-work, a whole range of music available to download (Hyland-Eriksen, 2001). Giddens (1991) has argued that the increased range of possibilities of identities on offer is in effect a cause of anxiety, where anxiety is the 'possibility of freedom' (Kierkegaard, 1944 cited in Giddens, 1991). The findings from my research corroborate this. As shown in the last chapter on fashion, it is often choice that creates wardrobe dilemmas, and leads instead to extremely conformist choices. Indeed when women select from the range of potential items in their wardrobes, faced with the full range of clothing, they often end up falling back on habitual clothing.

Habitual clothing is thus crucial to the ordering of life-worlds, as seen for example in clothing that coheres around social roles, women having separate clothing for work,

going-out, being at home and so on. Goffman defines a role as a person's specialized capacities (1974: 128), which become a 'social role' when attached to a particular status or position (1971a: 27). Such roles emerge out of a more constant personal identity, which is 'perduring over time...has a biography', and entails a 'multitude of capacities or functions, occupational, domestic and so forth' (1974: 128-9). As such the various capacities of the person are drawn out in certain situations as social roles. One of the ways in which this happens is through clothing: enabling particular capacities appropriate for a role. The implication of Goffman's understanding of the relationship between identity and roles is that the identity is constant, and the roles are drawn out situationally. Yet this chapter will raise the possibility that 'being normal' is itself a role, the contention being that habitual clothing does not just fit women's constant 'personal identity' (Goffman, 1974), it may also be transformatory in allowing a woman to conform to the norm of 'being ordinary'.

This raises another central question of this chapter: how habitual clothing links into issues of normativity. Cross-culturally, clothing is seen as firmly enmeshed within wider social and cultural matrices. In contrast, in a Western context clothing is often assumed to be an individual expression. However, as has been argued as far back as Durkheim, rather than such individualism being in opposition to society it is in fact a core cosmological value as the 'religion...of the modern individualized collectivity' (Thompson, 1998: 98). Cosmology is understood as how a society represents itself: an idealized version of how society ought to be, often encoding the ways in which the social and cosmic order is reproduced (Lan, 1989, Bloch, 1989, Bloch and Parry, 1982). When seen in a British

context, cosmological notions such as individualism can by the same token be understood as hortative rather than descriptive; we are all expected to have an individual self to express. The 'idea of culture' (Douglas, 1991: 134) becomes the 'idea of the self' (ibid, 1991: 213), as unitary and unique. The discrepancy between the ideal and actuality of the self is a focus of this chapter. In discussing family life, Gillis refers to the family we live 'by' as an ideal perpetuated by myths and rituals, in contrast to the actuality of family life (1996: xv). In the same manner, there is a self we live by in contrast to actual practices through clothing where women cannot be bothered to externalize a unique self all the time, and fall back on habitual clothing. The normative expectation to both 'express yourself' through clothing, and be an individual, elides the self with individuality. In looking at the interplay between habitual and non-habitual clothing, this chapter will look at whether the self that is externalised through clothing is indeed unique, or conformist, leading to a reconsideration of Simmel's original thesis on fashion.

Habitual/ Non-habitual: examples of binary wardrobes:

The distinction between habitual and non-habitual clothing characterises all wardrobes I looked at, and as this chapter will demonstrate is pivotal in the act of getting dressed. All women have both habitual and non-habitual items, yet the degree to which this dominates their wardrobe differs for different women. The two examples to be taken here are of women who have extremely clear demarcations between the two; both women have similar lifestyles. Sonya is writing up her doctoral research and Clare is doing an MA in Fine Art. Both women live with their boyfriends and usually work alone at home during the day. Despite this similarity in lifestyles, they come from extremely different

backgrounds; Sonya is a British Asian woman born in London, yet schooled in India, and Clare is a white English woman from a traditional working class family in the South of England. Despite the evident cultural differences between the two women, this common division between habitual and event-wear, which is by far the most salient division of wardrobes in general, signifies that it is not pre-existing sociological categories that are the most important when it comes to clothing.

Clare spends most days at home, going in to university a couple of days a week; every day she wears one of her pairs of jeans or black cords, with one of her many t-shirts, usually with some form of print or picture on it, and a jumper for cooler weather. Her act of getting ready in the morning is swift, selecting whichever t-shirt is on top of the pile in her chest of drawers, and similarly the pair of jeans or trousers that are easiest to access. If she is going in to university, she often dresses in a smarter manner, and so puts on one of her fitted black shirts (she has 6 of them). When she is getting ready to go out in the evenings, she spends more time deliberating over what to wear. On most occasions she ends up falling back on her pair of embroidered jeans, and either a little pink top or one of her smarter black shirts "I can always wear my black shirts, they go with everything". The black shirts and the jeans which define her habitual wear are worn all the time as they 'go' with everything, as the burden of assemblage is alleviated. Although she has a full wardrobe to choose from, rather than this range of items making dressing easier, it causes her to fall back on these 'reliable' items. In common with many other women I interviewed, such a wide range of potential outfits is experienced as a constraint. Simmel (1971) has argued that in modern society the sheer quantity of consumer goods leads to

our incapacity to appropriate them in the development of subjective culture. This is even more marked with contemporary consumer culture and translates to the wardrobe, when women are surveying the totality of their clothing, they are oppressed by the sheer volume from which to choose. The range of options carries the corresponding fear of 'getting it wrong', leading women to fall back on tried and trusted items and combinations.

A defining feature of habitual wear is its routinised nature. The relationship between routines and the infinite range of potential actions is discussed in a variety of contexts in terms of how anxiety, dread and failure are managed (Garfinkel, 1984, Goffman, 1971b, Giddens, 1991). Garfinkel writing in particular on language, points out that each situation demands 'bracketing out' of a particular phrase from the many possible responses. This relies upon a shared framework of reality. Actions, gestures, remarks and appearance management (Goffman, 1971a) are similarly routinised and have a role in establishing social stability and organizing everyday reality. Clothing forms part of this routinised control of the body (Goffman, 1971b). From the many potential items in the wardrobe, women are able to fall back on habitual clothing, which is known to work, as a way of preventing anxiety and establishing 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991). When women perceive they have 'got it wrong', the self they had hoped to externalize fails to materialize and this may well lead them to question not only the clothing but, as the clothing forms an externalization of the self, they are questioning their very capacities to be that person.

Habitual items are utilized to resolve many of the problems and considerations that getting dressed often entails, including how to combine items to form an outfit. As the items Clare falls back on are black and denim (in common with many women I interviewed), they are perceived as 'safe', making apparent a wider cultural trend towards seeing black and denim as appropriate for any social occasion. Wearing such fabrics and styles means that she is not made visible. She is able to be 'comfortable'. As discussed in previous chapters 'comfort' does not just relate to softness of fabric, this comfort is also aesthetic. Often this aesthetic fit comes from items being worn many times, as the wearer becomes familiar with them, and 'know' they will feel and look good. Part of this is the knowledge of how to wear the items. Dressing, and wearing items, are acquired competences and skills, as part of wider bodily self-management. Goffman (1971b: 248) notes that any gesture or activity will have been awkward or difficult when first tried, even activities so taken for granted such as walking, tying your shoes. It is only through long-term practice that these practices become naturalized. So too habitual clothes are no longer awkward or worn in a self-conscious manner.

Forming a sharp contrast to these items, which are worn and washed so often, are the items which Clare either wears very rarely, or in many instances has only worn once. This 'event-wear' consists of outfits for weddings, balls or formal parties. One such outfit she has worn to her graduation ball, and is shown on the photos below, it consists of a separately bought top and skirt, both from the Monsoon sale by her mother.



Photo 16: Clare's ball top



Photo 17: Clare's ball skirt.

When worn, the halter-neck top is holds close on to the body with the thin spaghetti strap around the back of the neck; as the top is fitted to the body, the angles and positions of the sequins lead to a detailed contouring of the body through the sparkling of the sequins, as the light catches each one differentially. The skirt part of the outfit fits around the waist and hips, and then, remaining structured throughout, goes out in an A-line shape to the floor. The skirt is made of silk with a thin gauze layer on top, and so when the material folds it has the appearance of an oil slick, the folds appearing like a dash of white lightening. When worn, the rigid folds of the plentiful skirt brush against the legs, as the raw silk rustles with every step taken. Having only been worn once, the skirt encapsulates the memory of this one event, as the first ball Clare had ever been to, which she still talks about with animated excitement. Wearing a formalized skirt, and the skimpy top that glitters and sparkles, a consciousness of the outfit was engendered in her when she wore it. Thurgood-Haynes (1998), writing on debutantes' dresses, discusses how the ornate jeweled and beaded corseted robes both engenders a physical and psychological transformation in the wearer. Clare's dress is far less elaborate, yet similarly the sequins which dazzle in the lights and the rigidity of the fabric materialize a transformation in Clare who self-consciously engages with her image through an outfit that makes her look and feel very different. Through the normative expectations of the event Clare dresses to conform to particular conventions. Ordinarily she wears the same clothes all the time and it is only on this type of social occasion that she is forced to dress in a 'different' way. Through the dress's material, shape and structure, it falls in contrast

to the rest of her wardrobe and therefore marks it off as 'out of the ordinary'. It is separated off as a kind of memento.

The chapter on biography considered how memories may be stored in items of clothing. Here too, as the dress is only worn once it is separated off as an isolated event. In common with many of Clare's other dresses such items are not meant to be part of the active wardrobe. This also raises a key temporal dimension in the habitual/non-habitual division. Hyland-Eriksen (2001) points out that there are different types of time: the 'slow-time' of family and leisure (also found in Sennett, 1998), which is increasingly being encroached upon and supplanted by fast time and 'tyranny of the moment' (Hyland-Eriksen, 2001). Fashion characterizes this tyranny of the fleeting moment, as the fashionable is defined by being of the moment, as soon as an item is 'in' it is on the verge of being 'out'. What emerges through women's clothing practices is a slower cyclical time, as seen in habitual wear. With the exception perhaps of some affluent teenagers, wardrobes fall in opposition to this 'fast time', with only a small section of them set aside for swiftly changing 'fashion' items. Another temporality that is present in the wardrobe is 'event-wear', separated out from any other cycles of active clothing. Worn rarely, a key characteristic of non-habitual clothing is that it is temporally frozen.

The second example, Sonya, tends to wear the same clothes day in day out, and has a similarly clearly demarcated division between going out wear and habitual wear. In the day time she tends to wear loose baggy trousers – either jeans or cotton Maharishi¹⁷ trousers; and a fitted high neck top (she never reveals any flesh, often not even wearing

¹⁷ A designer label, which makes cotton loose combat style trousers.

sleeveless tops), and trainers. Some of these items such as her trousers she does cross over to go out to a bar in, yet she has many 'event' tops or dresses which remain an isolated order, worn only for particular events. Ordinarily Sonya wears her casual clothes in dark colours every day as she works on her thesis at home, occasions when she is called upon to wear something different are moments for intense deliberation and trying on of outfits in front of the wardrobe. On such social occasions she has to consider herself in a 'seen' context. Usually when she is mooching around at home alone, she does not concern herself with looking 'individual'. It is the social occasion that means she is called upon to be an individual, with the ensuing normative expectations that she will dress in a unique manner that best expresses her self. In his discussion of the development of modern life, Simmel (1971) identifies two forms of individualism: as equality, when people are freed from social constraints and hierarchies, and the second form which characterizes modern life where individuality is equated with being unique and different. The widespread cultural discourse is one that means that such individuality is made manifest in appearance as well as personality and behaviour. For Simmel these two forms of individuality are subsequent historical developments. However, rather than the two being mutually exclusive, what we see here is that the normative expectation is to be an individual in the sense of uniqueness and incomparability. Therefore 'individuality' as a social norm is both paradoxically conformist, yet is still expected to be a unique cultural enactment.

Many of her 'event-wear' is what she calls "pieces" bought from an antique clothing shop, such as a 1940s jacket, a 1950s Chinese jacket or 1930s embroidered waistcoat, which I will discuss here, and is depicted in the photograph below:



Photo 18: Sonya's antique waistcoat

The waistcoat is in fact a men's item (Sonya is very small and svelte), and it thus not fitted to the body, nor does it curve in at the waist, but rather hangs straight down along the body. It is made predominantly of heavy black wool. There is a wide band of embroidery encircling the neckline which frames and surrounds Sonya's face. Sonya does not wear anything under it, and wears a pair of navy or grey cropped trousers with it: making it "funky" rather than staid. She has worn it to a 21st birthday party, and also to someone's engagement party. As she rarely has a chance to wear it she states that in fact she wishes she had a display cabinet to put it in. The item of clothing is valued through

aesthetic distance, the body beneath is not revealed nor the focus of attention. Even when worn, there is no fusion between the wearer and the item. As discussed in the chapter on personal aesthetics, Rosie's experiences of the failed outfit make her conscious of the heaviness of the leather skirt. In her case, the feeling of the externality of the item is experienced as a negative, as the item was meant to be an 'easy' one she could rely on to make her feel good. In Sonya's case, and indeed characteristic of 'event wear' more widely is that such items are supposed to make the wearer conscious of wearing them. Once they become 'comfortable' and fused with the wearer they are by definition then habitual wear.

Such 'pieces' compose a large part of her event wear, yet another major constituent of this type of clothing is her Indian clothing. Although she was born in Croydon, having only lived in India for a while when she was at school, her parents are Indian. Having refused to wear such clothing when she was younger, now in her early 30s, and having gone on her first trip to India recently without her parents, she has started to acquire and wear more Indian clothing, much to the delight of her mother. She would never wear such items as casual wear and only wears them on smarter occasions. In fact this relationship to her 'Indian' clothing is the same as one of my other main informants Mumtaz, whose parents are originally from India, and lived there for a while. She has a vast selection of Indian clothing, which she wore habitually in India, now living in London again, she only wears them to weddings or other formal occasions. The formal occasion involves an evocation of traditional wear, and equally in a context where most people do not wear such clothing, the wearing of what appears to be traditional clothes

that conform, is in fact 'individual'. For Sonya, such Indian clothing has never been her habitual wear, and she bought several outfits on her recent trip to India with her partner. One such outfit she bought is shown in the photograph below and consists of a top, skirt and scarf.



Photo 19 top



Photo 20: scarf



Photo 21: Skirt

Whilst bought as an outfit the top is extremely different in style to the scarf and skirt; the items coincide sufficiently for Sonya to feel she can wear it to a forthcoming wedding. However, she has also worn the top separately. The top curves in slightly at the waist, yet remains relatively loose, when worn; the delicate beading on the top sparkles subtly with bodily movements, yet due to the colour and size the effect is extremely subtle. She loves the “old, vintage, antique-y look” of the top; rather than this solely being conceptualized as an ‘Indian’ top, the aesthetic of it is something which fits with Sonya’s ordinary ‘event-wear’ style: as purchased from the antique shop. She similarly plans to wear the skirt separately, seeing it as a casual skirt to be worn in the summer with one of her funky tops. The outfit thus exists as ‘special’ in its totality, as an outfit bought in India, yet simultaneously in its constituent parts Sonya hopes to be able to wear the parts separately.

‘Event’ wear is only worn at social occasions in the presence of other people, not at home alone. It is on such social occasions, when subject to the gaze of others, that a unique look is forced by the occasion. Sonya professes that what she loves about her 1930s waistcoat is that it excites a great deal of comment for being so unusual. The paradox being that in looking unique, she is conforming to this reified notion of ‘the individual’. For Sonya, one of the ways in which she is able to make herself appear individual is through wearing her ‘Indian’ clothing; not ordinarily dressing in such clothing, and having been born and brought up in England, her ethnicity is not made visible through her clothing. However, in wearing such outfits, she is able to use her ethnicity as a resource, the clothing mobilizes facets of her self and family past that she chooses not to emphasise

on a daily basis. As such, she is making herself look different, yet still being her self. She is conscious of wearing these items, yet as it brings out a facet of herself not there ordinarily, therefore the outfit, and the self it mobilizes, are defined as 'special'. She manages to conform to the generalized and abstract ideal of having a unique self, through her particular resources and enactment of this.

Transformations in the self:

Sonya's example raises a key facet of event/non-habitual wear, which is that such clothing may mobilize personality traits or aspects of the self that are not ordinarily present. Often the items worn as event wear are more difficult to wear; as they are worn less frequently the wearer has less of an embodied knowledge of how to wear them. Event wear often has particular material characteristics; for example, Rosie has 2 Vivienne Westwood bustiers: one navy blue and the other dark green; they are covered in sequins, and are physically constructed with under-wiring and boning in order to create a particular bodily shape: the breasts are elevated and pushed together to create a bouncing cleavage, and the waist is pulled in, in order to give an hourglass shape. The matching velvet skirt was one which rested on the hips, clung to the bottom, and then hung loosely right down to the floor. Rosie wore this outfit to a wedding. She also frequently wore the bustier, with a short fitted denim skirt to go to the gay clubs she used to frequent.

The shoes she wore were what she calls her "drag-queen shoes": silver glitter platforms, the heel is raised about 6 inches in total. They sparkle and glitter in the light, and are so enormous that on wearing them, they dominate Rosie's slim legs. The shoes make her

into this masquerade of femininity, the camp-ness needed to go to a gay club. Rather than just reflecting a facet of her personality Rosie could behave in a way which she would not ordinarily. The item of clothing enacts a different way of behaving, in which she feels more confident, sexy, more able to behave in an outrageous manner. These shoes, like the bustier, will not be assimilated into the habitual, as they come to dominate the wearer. Throughout this thesis, the ways in which clothing may be agentic has been raised, as clothing does not merely passively reflect identities women wish to project. Here, Rosie has to 'fit' the items and the self they dictate, otherwise she would in effect be letting the clothing down. However, Rosie has still made the active choice of selecting these shoes, and corset tops, as she knows the physical effects they will have upon her. Through the materiality of the shoes, and the bustier, such items will never be 'easy' to wear, or subsumed to the will of the wearer, but rather enact and enable a transformation in the wearer (Brydon, 1998, Steele, 2001, Summers, 2001). This exuberant, camp, excessive self is only possible for Rosie through the clothing, and is a self which exists by virtue of the external support of the bustier tops.

This example is an extreme one; as the wearing of a corset style top has a marked physical effect on the body, and is bound to transform the wearer, even if only at the level of bodily deportment. However, what is important in understanding the transformatory needs to be seen in the context of the wardrobe of a whole. For example, Marie, a single 28 year old who works in a second hand book store, owns hardly any event or going-out clothing. She has a range of trousers and shirts that she wears to work, and a selection of casual t-shirts and jeans that she wears at home, or out to the pub. In the whole of her

wardrobe she has one event-wear outfit which she bought especially for an art-gallery opening to which she was recently invited. The dress code was black tie. She had contemplated wearing some black clothes she already had, yet a couple of friends insisted that she had to buy a dress, and managed to cajole her into it. The purchase she eventually made was a knee-length strappy black dress. The straps are made out of satin, and the top part of the dress, which, as the photo shows is cut into a bra cup shape, is also made of satin. The rest of the dress hangs loosely, and is made of black polyester. As she owned no other dresses buying that dress was “a bit of an ordeal, I mean it was nice to buy but I didn’t really know what I was doing. Also I had to buy the shoes, a pair of stockings, and a strapless bra. It’s like everything that goes with this dress, not just the dress!”

She jokes about the dress that now she is “turning into a real woman”. She has never owned such a dress, and on wearing it she not only had to stand and walk in a different way (as she was wearing heels and not wearing trousers). More than that she admits she felt different, more “feminine”. The outfit in itself is in fact extremely conventional in its femininity and what many women would in fact consider an ‘easy’ comfortable outfit to wear. In his discussion of modern family life in the West, Gillis points to the discrepancy between the idealised model we have, as perpetuated through myths and rituals, and the actual families we live ‘with’ (1996: xv). The former becomes an idealised model, as a reference point for the actual everyday practices of family life (also discussed in Miller, 2001b). Similarly here we see that Marie has never done ‘being a woman’ or ‘feminine’ before and attempts it by utilising the normative model of conventional femininity, which

in effect is not how most women dress most of the time. For many women 'being a woman' is not something self-consciously engaged with, and becomes part of their everyday practices. As Marie is attempting it for the first time, she selects her outfit in reference to the most normative femininity in order to transform herself. This example, in common with all of the others, shows that characteristic of clothing that will 'transform' the wearer is that it falls in distinction to the rest of the wardrobe so on wearing it the woman is conscious of the item. By virtue of this, the item is able to bring to the surface facets of the self that are not present ordinarily through the materiality of the items. Such items are usually linked to specific occasions¹⁸, and thus the wearer has to match both the social expectations of place, and indeed to live up to the item of clothing itself. Whilst such items 'transform' in a self-evident way, I will raise in the next section the possibility that habitual items may have such an effect.

Different habitual domains:

A defining feature of much event wear is that it is 'transformatory'; yet even though habitual wear falls in opposition to such event wear, this does not mean that habitual wear is therefore constant and unchanging. Habitual wear also enacts a change in the wearer, yet in an extremely different way. This is made apparent by looking at the many domains of habitual wear, which often engender very different, at times contradictory, selves. In the opening example of Clare, the day habitual wear, and the going-out habitual were discussed. In particular to be considered here is the introduction of work clothing as for many women this is a crucial dimension of women's wardrobes.

¹⁸ Although I did encounter several women who wore their event wear around the house, as they had the items of clothing, but no occasion that could live up to the items. Some women even created social occasions, such as had a black-tie or themed party, primarily for the reason of wearing a particular dress.

Margaret, a married primary school teacher in her early 30s, has three sets of clothing in her wardrobe: home, work, going out. Her work clothing is worn daily, and all conforms to a particular type: a fitted shirt with grey or black loose fitting trousers. A particular favourite of hers is a pale blue fitted ribbed long sleeved top, with a collar, from Next that does not require ironing. All of her tops and shirts worn to work have collars, something which serves to adequately formalize the item. Her central concern at work is how to remain both comfortable, yet also to be taken seriously as a woman at work. She berates the headmistress at her school for wearing a puffer jacket and a bum-bag “why didn’t she just get a handbag, like any other woman?” Margaret rarely wears skirts to work, finding them a “hassle”; yet she manages her femininity through the carrying of a handbag, the fitted nature of the shirt in a colour such as lilac, which is still sufficiently formalized through the masculine structured collar. As Goffman (1971a) points out, the enactment of social roles is fundamentally achieved by the clothes worn.

Goffman (1974) defines roles as particular attributes a person possesses cohering together. The external situation, such as work, calls for particular capacities in order to fulfil the role, one of the ways in which this coherence is managed is through clothing. The attributes necessary for work are activated through the wearing of the work clothing. How Margaret dresses is part of how she ‘frames’ (Goffman, 1974) the situation as work; the frame is the shared understanding people have of the situation, that defines it as ‘work’ along with the normative expectations of how to behave and to dress the body. Clothing, as part of this, ensures that others will both assume Margaret’s adequacy in a

work context, and similarly she is able to perform her work role. As part of this she brackets out and submerges aspects of the self that are not pertinent to that role, such as a shirt that was too low-cut or tight would be considered inappropriate as her sexuality is not an aspect of her work self. Separating out habitual domains, allows Margaret to match different aspects of her self to different domains.

Rather than just being a uniform that is being put on¹⁹, as worn day in day out, selected by Margaret herself, in a style typical of her aesthetic, this too is her habitual wear. Her habitual selves become so entrenched that they cannot be conjoined, remaining distinct. Work clothing is never worn out, or on other occasions. Many of her home trousers or other going-out trousers, are very similar in style: being loose, baggy with a drawstring waist in dark colours. Yet by not mixing the domains of clothing is a way of enabling Margaret to draw a boundary between the two aspects of her life, she admits she finds it very “useful...makes life easier” to keep these clothes separate. As soon as she returns home from work, she always changes into her jeans or casual trousers, a t-shirt and her grey Timberland fleece. As Nippert-Eng (1996) points out, people, through material means, attempt to draw boundaries between different domains as ‘territories of the self’. In ordering her wardrobe she is not only ordering life domains, but is also ordering temporally. As was mentioned earlier ‘event-wear’ is temporally divorced from the active cycles of clothing. This habitual clothing constitutes the core of the active clothing within the wardrobe as it is returned to as each working day repeats itself. Such processes of

¹⁹ For many other women work-wear was perceived more in terms of a relationship of ‘distance’ i.e. they did not feel the outfit to be ‘me’ at all. As such they experience what Goffman terms ‘role-distance’: wearing of items that enable the enactment of that role, and the appropriate ‘framing’ of the situation, yet ones which the wearer feels aware of the discrepancy between the item and themselves.

demarcation make moments of dressing easier; whilst many women blur the boundaries, very few women have the confidence or skill to combine, and recombine endlessly, without location or work demarcations.

Within each habitual domain most women personalize the normative outfits with something that is 'me', seen for example in the colours Margaret picks for her work shirts. Women are able to manage the 'role-distance' (Goffman, 1974) through bringing in within the outfit aspects of their own personal preferences. Even when women have several habitual selves, many women consider one to be 'really me'. This authentic self is not work for most women, but either home, going-out or a combination of both. Indeed, one of the reasons for separating out the different domains is that the 'non-authentic' work self does not contaminate the home self which is 'really me'²⁰. In the domain of work, the clothing has to be conforming to fit the normative codes of the work-place. Even at home, despite the fact that there are no normative codes, as women are not visible to anyone else, the convergence around the same types of clothing for different women makes apparent that in fact the 'authentic' self is in fact extremely normative and not as 'individual' as we might expect. Here the habitual clothing is seen to be agentic, wearing items such as jeans (to be discussed later) in effect the wearer is diminishing the self in conforming to a type or category of clothing that everyone wears. Therefore, both 'event' and 'habitual' wear may be conforming; for event wear the normative comes in the expectation to 'be an individual' or to a particular clothing code. In the habitual

²⁰ Although there are obvious exceptions, some women seeing the event wear as being the most closely evocative of their 'true' selves, even if they hardly ever wear these clothes, raising an interesting issue of whether a fantasy self can be the most authentic self, and if so, what role habitual wear plays for such women.

domain, in contrast, women perceive clothing to be ‘really’ me yet the actual items they choose are extremely conformist. This raises the issue of where the self in its particularity lies, or if indeed contrary to expectation it is extremely conformist. It would seem that it is only when, like in the case of Sonya’s wearing of her ‘Indian’ clothing, the normative is activated in a dialectic with the particular that ‘the self’ is activated. Rather than the self being located solely in any particular domain, as people often verbally assert, or indeed as either habitual or non-habitual, in fact the self exists in between the two: as simultaneously normative and individual, as a particular enactment of a generalized ideal category.

Mechanics of selection, the interplay between habitual and non-habitual:

Whilst every single woman I worked with possessed both habitual and event wear items in their wardrobes, the boundaries between the two domains are not absolute. As discussed in the previous chapter on fashion, women attempting to create innovative new looks often might wear a smart dress over jeans and trainers as a dressed-down, going-out outfit. As such, women utilize and manipulate the divisions between habitual and event wear in order to make an outfit both comfortable yet also noticed. What constitutes ‘habitual’ is not unchanging, and in fact it is through the interplay between the two domains that new outfits and ultimately new habitual wear may be created. As dressing is the moment of connection between the person and the social world they are about to enter, the ‘real’ me and appropriate outfit is changing and shifting, and as such there is no preceding and unchanging self, but rather it is produced through acts of dressing and wearing. One of the ways in which this ‘real’ me is created is through the act of ‘framing’

(Goffman, 1974). A frame is how definitions of a situation are built up, how experience is organized through interaction. From the whole realm of possibilities of how to speak, act and indeed dress, framing delimits a range which produces the reality of a situation. Yet, as Goffman argues, whilst such framings are not dependent upon an external reality and are indeed constitutive of it, frames are not entirely independent. The individual projects a certain frame of reference on the world around, which is usually confirmed by events and others responses (1974: 39). Similarly, habitual wear is one of the ways we frame the social world; for example in work we create the setting and our position, role and selves within that. As this is derived in part interactionally, in the context of others, as contexts are shifting, so too the clothing must adapt to incorporate external environments and by definition habitual wear cannot be unchanging. I will discuss here how such a change in habitual wear comes about and the implications this has.

Patsy, a single woman in her early 30s, is someone for whom the process of deciding what to wear in the morning is at times agonising, often making her late for work. Every weekend she plans what she will be wearing on Monday, and Tuesday mornings, and the process of getting ready is easy and quick. As she becomes more exhausted by the rigours of the working week and the inevitable socializing that follows her working day, towards the end of the week the process of decision making becomes more agonizing and elongated. On such occasions, Patsy inevitably always seems to end up wearing her knee high fabric black boots, a denim skirt, a black belted cardigan. The boots are by far the most foundational item in her winter wardrobe, which she admits to 'living in', wearing them almost daily, only changing into shoes on the rare occasions she can force herself

out of her boots, for fear of them becoming ruined. The boots are an assumed starting point for her selection of an outfit, as is the black tie cardigan – this being a key shape for Patsy – seen in its omnipresence in both her summer and winter wardrobes, in a variety of colours. As these items are pretty much a ‘given’ if she can’t decide what to wear, the first item she has to actively select is her denim skirt (of which she has a range), as opposed to a couple of other A-line skirts she often falls back on. The final item she has to choose, and that is least predictable is the top she will wear. In the winter it is usually either a polo-neck or a long-sleeved t-shirt style fitted top. Having selected the skirt, she picks a top that she checks will ‘go’ with the skirt. These 2 items having been selected, she tries them on with the boots, to check the top goes with her foundational items, and the outfit is assembled. Getting ready for work inevitably involves such a trajectory, from the assumed boots and cardigan that she ‘knows’ she can absolutely rely on, to the active choice of one of her habitual skirts, and finally the top which is selected in reference to the skirt as the whole outfit is pieced together.

She dresses like this most days, and is someone who adores clothing, seen in her vast wardrobe; yet there are occasions when she forces herself out of this routine. On one particular occasion in late February, feeling she needed a mid-week perk, deadened by wearing black and dull colours all winter, she decides to wear her new lime green ribbed, fitted polo-neck. As the item is new, there can be no pre-determined outfit. On this occasion instead of pre-assuming the most habitual item she owns, the boots, she starts off with the most exciting: the new green jumper. Unaccustomed as she is to deliberating over shoes and boots, the next decision she has to make is what skirt she can wear. She

decided that, as the jumper was so vibrant, she should wear more toned down items. As such, she wanted to wear one of her denim skirts; however this was not as straightforward as she assumed, as she has 6 such skirts.

Although denim as a fabric, and a colour was felt to match the outfit, which specific denim skirt proved problematic. She initially concluded that an A-line knee length one was appropriate, as she knows this shape goes with the boots; her 'usual' work one was in the wash, so she deliberated over 2 others. One she professes to be her 'favourite', but more as an evening or summer skirt, she decided to try on anyway. It is indigo denim, with a slit at the front, which goes right up to the top of the thighs. Thinking it would be fine with black opaque tights on, not showing excess leg, she tried this on, but just "didn't feel like that today. It's not right". However, by now thoroughly disheartened, she looks at the other one, and remembers that it makes her look "hip-y". Although initially appearing to be identical, knee length, dark inky denim, yet with a smaller slit, in fact across the front there is a horizontal seam (just below the front pockets, which goes all around the front of the skirt). On the body, this seam sits at the widest part of the hips, drawing attention to them, as not only is it the only detailing on the skirt, but also the stripe serves to delineate the width of the hips. She did not even try this one on.

Still adamant she will wear the green jumper, she rummages through her cupboard and encounters a long, ankle length, A-line denim skirt, with a slit at the back; this is the item she ends up wearing. 'I can always rely on this one!' The 'easiness' and reliability of the item is based upon: fabric and shape – the A-line style is one which sits tightest on the

waist and hips then the fabric widens into an A. Width is created by the fabric, serving to minimise the width of the hips. Furthermore this is one that is 'tried and trusted'; worn so often it is known to work and assimilated into habitual wear. Patsy managed to select an appropriate skirt, from the range of her habitual items. As she has several habitual items, this particular one had not been worn for a few months, as it gradually moved towards the back of the cupboard. As such, she then has to check that this skirt and top go with the boots and cardigan she has selected (as the skirt is a longer length).

On this occasion the ordinary trajectory is inverted, as the most exciting item is the first one chosen, and the most habitual ones are tried on last. This sequence is in fact quite common for women, when they want to break out of their normal patterns. They enforce a change by selecting a single new or special item from which subsequent habitual items must be matched. The 'special' item is then domesticated, and made wearable and comfortable by being teamed with safe habitual items. The only way in which Patsy is able to perk herself up is by forcing the habitual to take second place, to get out of what she perceives as the drabness of selections. Patsy is able to both perk up her mood, to be noticed in a slightly different outfit, yet still to feel comfortable in her 'classic items'. Importantly this also enables her to transform the unseen context of work into a seen one. Ordinarily as she dresses the same everyday, she does not dress to be seen or noticed, which is altered by shifting her habitual wear. Yet in this process of combination, as it is conjoined in the outfit with the habitual, she is not disrupting the normative. Here Patsy is not falling back on the conformity of her habitual clothing, which may in effect diminish herself through such conforming acts. Rather she is creative in re-introducing her 'self'

into her habitual clothing. This self-conscious engagement with her habitual clothing leads to her being able to both define herself through the normative, yet through her own particular enactment of it.

Denim – the mediator between the habitual and non:

Patsy's dilemma's make clear that even despite having habitual clothing that is supposed to make dressing easier, in dressing women have to negotiate a series of often opposing factors: the expectation to conform, looking like themselves, to be seen, yet to still feel comfortable, to wear clothing that is safe and fits normative expectations, yet is still interesting and exciting. Often in the face of such burdens and expectations women fall back on the habitual, yet then the routine logics of selection perpetuate the feelings of drabness and dullness. Patsy shows the ways in which this primary division between habitual and event wear is a way of forcing the clothing routines to be broken. As such getting dressed is not only the perpetuation of habitual selves, yet also the breaking of such selves, and creation of new ones. One of the fundamental problems women face when dressing is that even if the array of clothing is immense and diverse, in the act of dressing women have to commit to an outfit. As such, they are not able to be all the possibilities their wardrobe may offer. Successful combination may allow a degree of ambiguity in an outfit, through linking the habitual and the non-habitual. This can also be achieved to a degree through one fabric: denim. Denim dominates almost all wardrobes that I investigated, as many women admit to "living" in jeans, and is a key part of the habitual, being 'easy', 'goes' with everything. It acts as an intermediary, as a way of domesticating new or more difficult items, and of resolving the panicked moment of what

to wear. Jeans, denim skirts and denim jackets are both going-out wear, and also used for relaxing in the home. However the specific nature of the jeans used for home and for going out is extremely different as will be discussed; given its mode of construction, denim materially has the capacity to fulfill both functions.

Denim is a very heavy twill fabric, woven with tightly twisted cotton yarns. As a result of such tight twisting of the cotton yarns, the density of the fibres leads to an extremely strong, hardy and structured fabric (popularized first in the 18th and 19th century by manual labourers). Before denim is worn habitually and extensively the fabric is one which serves to maintain its rigid structure; as mentioned in the chapter on fashion, Alice wore a denim ball gown shape A-line skirt to a ball – as a virtue of being denim the rigid structure and shape was maintained. Furthermore when relatively unworn and new, denim is capable of structuring the body beneath. Many women I worked with, talked of their search for the ‘perfect’ pair of jeans; a search which seems incredible given the quantity of pairs of jeans owned by these women. Louise has in excess of 10 pairs folded in a pile in the bottom of her wardrobe, with cupboards full in her parents’ house; they are from a range of shops: Top Shop, H and M, Levis through to more expensive designer brands such as Diesel and DKNY. The diversity of retail outlets present in her jeans selection reflects her high-street wide search for the perfect pair of jeans that have yet to be found. She admits to even trying on Ghost or Nicole Farhi pairs, even though she does not have the means to afford them; if she found this ‘perfect’ pair she says she would spend “anything”. She has the exact mental image: “in my mind everything would fit really nicely. Cos I’ve got quite a flat bum, and the pockets always come half way down

my legs, so I'd want ones that kind of perked my bum up a bit...I like them really long, and boot-legged".

Louise pictures not only the jeans, but the body they would give her. She is tall and very slim, yet worries over the flatness of her bottom, and the length of her legs. The perfect jeans would give her the perfect bottom, through the positioning of the pocket – high up, reducing the distance between the waistband and the pockets, and thus creating the illusion of a shorter, higher bottom. Furthermore through the structuring effect of denim, the fabric would serve to 'pull up' and hold in the flesh of her bottom. The fantasy of jeans for Louise, and many other women I interviewed, entails both the fantasy of altering the shape of the body slightly through them, yet simultaneously, as something worn all the time, women 'know' how to wear them.

Jeans are not only cherished for their ability to structure the body, but also through the ability to soften and age with the wearer. Denim is made when the cotton fibres are tightly spun into yarns; the yarns are then wound onto perforated beams and immersed in a dye-bath of indigo dye (Hatch, 1993). As the yarns are wound so tightly, only the surface fibres are dyed – leaving the inner core of the yarns white. Furthermore, the indigo dye that is almost always used for denim in fact has a low affinity for the cotton fibres (Hatch, 1993), and washes down to light-blue shades easily, and without staining the white yarns in denim. Only the warp yarns (the fibres which go lengthways) are dyed; the weft fibres (the yarns which are woven horizontally) remain white. Once the warp yarns are dyed, the fabric denim is made by interweaving warp and weft yarns together;

as denim is a 'warp-faced twill fabric' (Corbman, 1985) more dyed fibres are visible as the warps pass over more yarn fibres, and therefore the ultimate effect is an uneven interlacing pattern. As it is 'warp-faced' this is why the back of denim appears lighter than the front. It is this also which gives denim the predominantly blue effect – yet with intermittent white stitches of the weft fibres.

The effect of this unique process of fabrication is that, as indigo is a relatively poor dye, jeans fade upon washing. Moreover as jeans are worn, the surface of the fibres is gradually eroded. Through the dyeing process, not only are weft fibres white anyway, yet even the dyed warp fibres are not fully penetrated with the dye. When the surface of the jeans is abraded, the darkened fibres are eroded, to reveal the white core of the fibres; the more this process occurs, more white is revealed, making the passage of wearing evident as white strings appear across the knees. As the yarns are so tightly wound, when first worn denim is a relatively rough fabric, yet as these become unwound as the surface fibres are eroded, the soft white cotton emerges, softening the fabric. The nature of denim changes as it is worn. Unsurprisingly a number of women I interviewed cited their most comfortable item of clothing as an aging pair of jeans. As the wearer changes, so to do the jeans, softening with age. They take in the body shape of the wearer, your smell and sweat. Herein lies part of the endless appeal of jeans: as a fabric and a style of trousers they are ubiquitous. However through this process of softening as the person wears them, they take on your body size, odour, and even have a shared biography with the wearer. Jeans are generic as a style yet the generic is simultaneously personalized through this material propensity to age. So important is this process of aging, that now many jeans are

enzyme washed – an industrial process that through chemical abrasion of the surface, artificially replicates the long term processes of wear and tear.

Denim therefore manages to encapsulate both the general type of clothing with the personalized. Similarly denim enables the wearer both to conform and yet simultaneously be individual. In part this is due to the constancy of denim's core identity: the distinctive fabric, manufactured in the particular way to give this structured degradation, the colour – despite the odd fashion for other coloured jeans - blue remains a constant. Irrespective of the vagaries of fashion, denim remains a permanent fixture in the worn wardrobe. Not only are jeans differentiated through their wearer's personalized wearing, but denim is also a fabric amenable to many processes and finishes. Finishes such as stonewashing, enzyme-washing – both of which produce a distinctive worn finish – enable fashions to be incorporated within the constant of the denim jeans. Now the sole constituent of denim is not only cotton, but also polyamide or Lycra which can be integrated into the fibres in order to give the fabric elasticity, adding further dimensions to its material capacities. Thus the safety and the reliability of jeans is maintained, yet through the details of the processes or practices such as embroidery, they can still be funky and cutting-edge. Louise, on the occasion of her friend's birthday, in an attempt to look funky and fashionable, finds nothing in her wardrobe she can wear. Her solution is to buy a pair of cropped jeans; thus she wears a current and fashionable trouser style, yet still in failsafe denim. Through the styling, and in other instances the processes and details, jeans are able to be 'exciting', yet still 'safe'. For many women they are therefore able to be a

staple of the practical day wardrobe – hardy, easy to wash, high combinational potential; they are also a key item of eveningwear.

Jeans thus allow the wearer simultaneously to conform, yet in a unique way, and to be an individual as the fabric takes on the wearer it is also personalized. This, therefore, resolves a fundamental contradiction of the self: as denim is worn all the time, women know how to wear it as aspects of the self are in fact extremely conformist. However, the events of the outside world, like Louise's imagined judgments of her friends, calls upon her to re-examine her wardrobe. The relationship that was not thought out, and unconscious, becomes a conscious cultivation, where individuality and uniqueness is expected. In the selection of an appropriate outfit, the wearer must at the same time conform to the social norms of what is expected wear. In the protean shifts of fashion, and the multiplicity of items that magazines claim to be 'in fashion' at any one given time, denim is stability and certainty. As something that almost everyone wears regularly, most women 'know' how to wear it. It is therefore 'comfortable'. Yet, moreover, although denim has a stable, core identity which is historically unshaken, the variety of cuts, processes and detailing available allow the wearer to feel individual in their selection. As the item, once chosen, becomes worn all the time, the wearer and jeans age symbiotically, like the human body becoming less taut and softer, so too jeans unwind as the fabric relaxes and softens to the touch.

Habitual, non-habitual and the mediation of the two

Denim, as both habitual and non-habitual, encapsulates the fundamental contradictions of the self as externalized through clothing. It is 'easy', as a result of its high combinational potential, and as it is ubiquitous and not confined to certain ages, classes or sub-cultures, it is perceived as 'safe'. The processes which can be applied to this conformist fabric (such as beading, embroidery, enzyme-washing, fringing, tie-dyeing) offer the consumer the possibility of being individual. This is accentuated as denim as a fabric ages with the wearer: the generic is personalized, conformity is individualized. The co-presence of such contradictions is fundamental to the self that is externalized through clothing; this is why every single wardrobe I looked at had both habitual and non-habitual clothing. This division helps to organize the experience of the self-in-the-world: as the wardrobe is organised into domains, experiences and temporal existences are also ordered. The latter is possible through either routinised habitual clothing, encoding a temporal cyclicity, or the separated out non-habitual clothing, which is thus demarcated as 'special'.

The two key implications of this ubiquity of this division in women's wardrobes are firstly, what kind of self is externalized through clothing and secondly how this division articulates normative values. Firstly, what becomes apparent from an understanding of this wardrobe division is that the relationship between habitual clothing and non-habitual clothing is sufficiently contrasting and externalizes different kinds of self, which I will argue are nonetheless complementary. Habitual clothing is often seen by women as being 'me', tying in to notions of 'comfort' as discussed in the chapter on personal aesthetics. A key feature of this division is the relationship between clothing and the body: with

habitual clothing, as the items have been worn often and become personalized through wearing the symbiotic relationship between body and clothing develops. Often having been worn so many times the item has softened, fitting to the body shape. With event wear, such items are rarely worn and are often more rigid and materially elaborate. As such, the items remain external to the wearer, as women are conscious of the items. This division impacts upon the moment of dressing. The wearing of non-habitual items involves a self-conscious engagement with the question 'is this me', as women deliberate over the potentialities of themselves in the external form of clothing. With habitual items, women just assume that it is a successful externalization of a core authentic self.

It would therefore appear that habitual and non-habitual clothing externalize extremely different selves; however, each aspect is equally important and, as the self is contradictory, it resides in both. When women select from their wardrobes, most often they choose habitual items, ignoring a vast proportion of their wardrobes as potential choices are experienced as a burden. Women use habitual clothing to thus establish 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991). In the face of all the disorienting potentials of who they could be, they fall back on who they know themselves to be. However, despite this, women still possess a full range of clothing within their wardrobe; no women only had habitual clothing, even if this was all they really wore. Having these non-habitual items in their wardrobe allows women the possibility that they could select from them. Just because many of these items are hardly ever worn does not make them any less important. It allows women the possibility of extending themselves through wearing these items; if women only possessed the 'easy' items they wore all of the time this

would delimit the potentialities of the self, and elide it with the actualities of what is worn.

Common to both habitual and non-habitual wear is that clothing has the capacity to draw out and submerge aspects of the self, dependent upon what is situationally appropriate. In Goffman's terms (1974), the 'capacities' within women which persist over time as part of their personal identity, are mobilized and come together with other attributes in social roles. However, within Goffman these 'social roles' are occupational, or related to status; what this chapter aimed to show is that being 'habitual' may also be a role: as the mobilization of particular attributes through clothing. In order to 'be ordinary' women may wear particular clothing which perhaps submerges exuberant aspects of themselves. This helps to account for why women's home wear, when no-one can see them, is often so conformist in style.

Event-wear may also activate 'special' aspects of the self; this raises the second major theme of this chapter, which echoes Simmel's observations on the fundamental contradiction that inheres to fashion: how normativity and individuality are present through clothing. In light of previous argument that being 'normal' may be a role, 'being individual' too could be a capacity of the self, rather than the self in its totality. 'The self' and 'the individual' are frequently assumed to be the same, in a societal context where we are both expected to have a self to express, and that the inner core of this self is utterly unique. What I will argue instead is that being an individual is an aspect of the self, just as conforming, or other normative aspects are also similarly capacities of the self. There

is a widespread cultural discourse that it is through social expectations that we are forced to conform, and therefore individuality is oppressed by social conventions. What emerges from the practices surrounding clothing is that in fact both are true. The clothing worn when alone, habitual wear, is incredibly conformist in style. Through social expectations women are placed under such an immense burden of the self, a burden to 'be an individual': which is conformist and expected to happen in a unique way. As is true of 'ideals' and the normative more widely, individuals' enactments of them will never be an exact realization of the ideal, and therefore by definition each enactment is individual. As has been written of small-scale societies, the more a person is able to conform to an ideal, the more individual they are seen as being (Lipman, 1965). For us, interestingly, this is also true, as the more 'quirky' someone appears, the more individual they are deemed to be. The 'individual' of the discourse is therefore extremely conforming.

One of the main themes of this thesis is to understand what the self is, as seen from the perspective of clothing. The self that emerges from this thesis is seen in the totality of the wardrobe, rather than in any one isolated domain. Rather than entering the hermeneutic cycle of ironing out meaning, and adjudicating between different domains and facets of the self, it would appear that these very contradictions are essential. The self is therefore simultaneously both self-conscious and relatively unreflexive; it is individual and unique, yet also normative and conforming. These contradictory notions may also be co-present in one item, or indeed even in one fabric as an examination of denim makes apparent. The self is thus a dialogue between the different aspects, and is characterized by these tensions and ambiguities. Simmel's understanding of fashion as involving an essential

tension between individuality and conformity can also be seen here as a core attribute of the self through clothing.

The self that emerges from this thesis is in fact very like a wardrobe, and as such the wardrobe is very useful by way of an analogy for 'the self'. The wardrobe has hanging within it a range of items, some forgotten about, some rarely worn but that women wish they could wear, others that are worn all the time. Similarly the self consists of many attributes, some which are present all the time and others that are present only in certain domains, others existing merely in the realm of fantasy. Particular social situations may call for particular attributes to be present and others to be absent. The self, like the wardrobe, is full of many contradictory attributes which may or may not be present on particular occasions. This is perhaps why clothing is so central and apt in attempts to create and externalize the self, as it is able to make present, and submerge aspects of the self. Clothing, as a material form, gives women the sensation of having a self, including a self with agency. Therefore the self does not precede the outfits, but rather through clothing women attempt to create themselves; when successful, women have a sense that this is 'me'. This 'me' is present by virtue of being materialized, and indeed partially created, through the clothing. A crucial part of this process of self-creation involves a creative interplay between habitual and non-habitual clothing; women may be both conformist and regress to safety, yet simultaneously creatively inject themselves into this as they may critique their conformist selves through clothing.

Conclusion: An ethnography of getting dressed

The traditional anthropological methodology of ethnography is characterized by the almost perpetual presence of the anthropologist in the field of enquiry, observing all activities and participating where possible. As getting dressed is an almost entirely solitary act, defined by being 'unseen', it would appear to be too inaccessible a moment for an ethnography. On an occasion when women stand alone, save for the presence perhaps of a child, friend or husband, the notion of an academic researcher being present as well seems entirely alien and impossible. As the majority of activities in contemporary Britain occur behind closed doors, academics who have carried out research in the home have pointed both to the difficulties of access and also to the necessity of carrying out such research (Hockey, 2002, Miller, 2001a). These concerns are even more marked when considered in the case of getting dressed, as one of the most private moments of all, occurring in the bedroom, the inner sanctuary of intimacy. What this thesis demonstrates is that it is possible to carry out an ethnography of getting dressed, albeit in an unconventional manner, as there is no 'field' or 'community' to which this research refers. The emphasis on a holistic, contextualized long-term involvement was still retained. I have demonstrated that such research is not only possible, but is, moreover, essential in order to understand the central dynamics of dressing and women's relationship to their clothing.

In carrying out this research, I have shown that women's wardrobes in London may be approached with the same situated and contextualized depth that characterizes more

traditional anthropological studies of clothing, where clothing is linked to memory (Hoskins, 1989), biography (Hendrickson, 1995) and relationships (Weiner, 1989). In this conclusion I will reconsider the anthropological debates and theoretical positions I have used, in the light of the findings of this thesis. Despite the diversity of backgrounds of women I interviewed, my research has made clear that the wardrobe is not an idiosyncratic reflection of an individual's personality. When all the wardrobes I looked at are considered together it is possible to arrive at a deeper understanding of the relationships women are able to construct through the material form of clothing. In turn, as I have demonstrated, whilst dressing takes place mostly alone, it is a social act. Therefore, the findings offer insight into the relationship between self-constructions and kinship, the expectations of the social situation and personal preferences and the relationship between normativity and individuality.

The wardrobe is amenable to a systematic analysis, as there are clear commonalities both to the way the wardrobe is ordered and, as a consequence, to the patterns of getting dressed. With the few exceptions of women who ordered their wardrobes aesthetically, most women organized their clothing primarily in terms of types of clothing (trousers, shirts, tops) and in terms of domains of life (work, going-out and 'fun'). As women organize their clothing they are also organizing their daily routines and life worlds. Given that no women ordered their wardrobe in terms of outfits (apart from the exceptional event wear outfits), the act of getting dressed is always creative, and therefore entails the possibility of failure. Within this creative act, there are still observable logics and patterns, as each selected outfit has consequences for the next one made. I have worked

with women who spend up to four hours getting ready and other women who take less than ten minutes; yet for all these women there is still an underlying logic to how assemblages are made, which lies in the tension between habitual and non-habitual wear as explained in Chapter 8. As this factor defines all women's patterns of dressing, irrespective of individuals' differing backgrounds, it makes an important point about carrying out research in contemporary Britain. Pre-defined sociological categories are not always those which are the most important to the ways in which people organize their lives. In many instances categories such as class may be the primary and defining identity, but this should emerge from the integrity of the data. In this thesis the most pertinent dynamic of wardrobes is the interplay between habitual and non-habitual clothing, which is common to all women I worked with. This division underpins the themes of all the previous chapters, being involved in the creation of fragile or robust selves, the attainment of aesthetic fit and 'comfort' and is seen in the interplay between individuality and conformity. As such, this is reconsidered in this conclusion as the core not only of wardrobes, but of how women get dressed and of the self that is created.

Situating the wardrobe in the context of wider theoretical debates:

This research was not based in any coherent territorial location, but rather the micro-site of research was individual women's wardrobes, connected through familial and friendship networks. Given that much anthropological research is the anthropology of place, contributing to the ethnographic record of a region, it is extremely difficult to compare my research with more traditional ethnographies. Whilst my research carries wider ramifications in terms of the way lives are organized in contemporary British

society, it is not an ethnography 'of' a particular place, but, as a study into material culture, focuses more upon a particular practice in order to understand processes of self-construction through clothing. Comparison is further impeded as most anthropology is carried out in societies which do not have the same emphasis upon privacy, or where the majority of activities are carried out in the public domain. Even within research on contemporary Britain that has been carried out in the home few empirical studies are carried out in the bedroom. However, the findings of this research still refract upon concerns which are present within the anthropological and indeed sociological literature. This thesis resonates with concerns in the anthropological literature on clothing; yet this is also a study into material culture and thus the emphasis is upon the materially particular and diverse ways clothing externalizes facets such as biography or kinship. Therefore, my findings also rethink certain theoretical positions on factors such as biography, kinship and the self. The multiple practices that pertain to dressing and wardrobe management offer an alternative trajectory of the self, as constituted relationally and biographically, to one which is considered through the explicit form of language.

One of the aims of this research was to see whether clothing in Britain could be understood with the same depth that is often assumed within anthropological accounts of clothing cross-culturally, and as situated in women's lives. I have found this to be the case, as my thesis has demonstrated the link between biography, memory and the objectification of former wearers. The intimate relationship between women and their clothing means that clothing has the capacity to 'hold' the wearer and, as such, forms an

externalization of a former self. By the same token, clothing may hold former wearers, and indeed be an external form through which memories may be stored. This resonates with the emphases in the anthropological literature on the cultural biographies of clothing (Renne, 1995, Hendrickson, 1995), as accumulated clothing may be an archive of the self (Weiner, 1989). Part of this 'archive', is that clothing may store former relationships and externalize social relations and connections between people.

Given the sheer quantity of clothing that many women possess, and the multiple possible practices, storing, wearing items, throwing them away, lending or gifting items to others and the ways in which clothing materializes biography and relationships are similarly multiple. I have shown how through such deliberate strategies women are able to manage their wardrobes, and as objects are pivots for reflexivity (Hoskins, 1998), in doing so women are able to order their biography, life-worlds and relationships. As such, in many cases women's strategies through the wardrobe form an empirical example of Giddens' (1991) understanding of the self as a reflexive engagement with a person's biography. Here the self has to be actively created and engaged with in the construction of a coherent narrative of the self. I have argued that in many cases the wardrobe forms part of this biographical project; in sorting out their clothing women may discard failed outfits, only keeping unworn in the wardrobe successful former selves or 'good' memories.

The wardrobe as part of the practice of a self 'project' also applies to how women manage their relationships through clothing. MacFarlane (1987) has stressed the importance of choice as a factor in relationships and kinship in contemporary Britain. In

deciding whether to wear, store or discard an item of gifted clothing, women are effectively accepting and simultaneously rejecting aspects of particular relationships. The relationships that exist in the clothing form part of the ongoing negotiations of dressing, in terms of the shifting relations of dependence and the continuing bond between mothers and daughters, as maternal love is objectified in the clothing. In an Indian context, Tarlo (1996) has written about how decisions over what to wear are not just over what colours go together, but involve political, social and familial considerations. In my ethnography, women have to balance not only their own multiple identities, but the various and often conflicting relationships that constitute them, as clothing that hangs in the wardrobe is animated and enchanted by givers and former wearers. Dressing involves the ongoing negotiations of their mother's love, preferences of partners and incorporates new relationships into their lives.

Given the diversity of practices through the wardrobe, it is possible for women to adopt entirely contradictory strategies, as relationships through clothing may be both ones of simultaneous dependence and independence. Women who still receive regular items of clothing from their mothers are often independent in all other aspects of their lives, exerting their own preferences and choices. My findings therefore corroborate Strathern's assertion (1992) of the complementarity of individuality and kinship in a British context. A degree of dependence upon mothers or husbands allows, rather than impedes, autonomy elsewhere. I also introduced the possibility that while the wardrobe is an extension of the self, yet, as it simultaneously contains many items bought by other people women are able to extend the self through the relationships that constitute them.

Therefore I have argued that kinship is not in opposition to self-construction, but rather is the very means through which it becomes possible.

A crucial aspect of the materiality of clothing is that it is systematically divergent from words and other material forms as a means of expression and in conveying meaning. There is a more subtle, material, non-explicit form through which clothing allows for the contradictory co-presence of dependence and autonomy, jealousy and equality which would not be possible verbally. Indeed it is this difference between verbal narratives and the material sensuality of clothing as a worn, lived object which points to the limitations of Giddens' understanding of the self as a biographical project. Whilst this may be valid at the level of verbalized self-narratives, a biography through the wardrobe is not a linear chronology. Apart from the separated off sections of wardrobes for unworn items, most clothing is not ordered chronologically but in terms of types of clothing, which is the basis upon which items are selected to be worn. Characteristic of traditional biography is the temporal sequence from past, present to future; yet through clothing, as former items are recombined, various pasts are made temporarily co-present in the act of wearing.

Situating the wardrobe in the context of fashion:

Whilst this research was not an ethnography of place, as, being situated in the context of two urban sites in Britain, my findings resonate with wider debates pertaining to issues such as self-identity and individuality in a British context. I have shown that an interrogation of self-construction through a material practice offers a more subtle and contradictory understanding than through verbal accounts alone. In the context of the

discourse of individuality and the corresponding burden of the self (Giddens, 1991, Belk, 1995), clothing has been shown to offer possibilities of conformity and of dependence. Another aspect of the context of this research is that it took place in a climate of rapidly shifting fashions and clothing styles. However, what I have shown is that merely because research takes place in such a context, women still have many long-term relationships to clothing and in some cases still wear items from over 30 years ago. Women do not select clothing solely based upon externally defined fashions and styles; their wardrobes are not characterized by rapid turnovers of styles. In order to understand women's clothing choices, it is necessary to situate the wardrobe in the context of women's lives and relationships. Clothing is not superfluous nor secondary to the women I interviewed, even to those who professed to have no interest whatsoever in what they wore. Rather clothing is constitutive of the person through their practices of wearing the clothing over periods of time, and through the relationships to others that inhere to the clothing. The findings from an ethnography of the wardrobe are also useful in highlighting the nature of the contemporary fashion 'system'.

The emphasis in the literature on fashion on fragmentation (White et al, 2000), and the lack of any agreement on what is in fashion at any one time, is reinforced by my research. In such a context there is, therefore, no clear locus for the origin of new styles and fashions. This thesis has offered an understanding of one possible domain of innovation: the wardrobe. Much has been written on 'the street' as a site for the generation of new looks, however here I have looked at how individuals are able to create new styles, and how, through friendship groups such looks are adopted. As there is no defined 'fashion'

the burden is on the individual to be an innovator, to be creative in seeing the possibilities of novel combinations. Such new looks arise out of the 'rules' of clothing and whilst such rules offer safety for the vast majority of women, they are the very basis for fashion leaders' creativity. In many ways this tension between the fashion conformist and the innovator shows an empirical example of the tension Simmel identified (1971) between individuality and conformity. 'Fashion' is not a separate part of this thesis, to be added on to the more fundamental act of getting dressed, but as I argue, it articulates the same central tensions as the act of dressing, which ties in to other oppositions such as that between habitual and non-habitual clothing.

Getting dressed as the creation of social individuals:

This thesis has demonstrated that dressing is a fundamentally social moment. It happens primarily alone, in the most private domain of the home, as women agonise over their body shape, and many other insecurities that are rarely part of the self that is presented publicly. However, at the same time women are considering how others will perceive their outfits, as they stand in the unseen context of the bedroom, imagining the seen context for which they are dressing. Sennett (1971) has argued that the private domain is gradually encroaching on the public, as the search for intimacy pervades all areas of life. The opposite position is apparent when clothing is seen from the perspective of the wardrobe; dressing is never just a private moment, where the individual considers her own preferences. Women are unable to avoid the imagined and feared judgments of others. The considerations of the opinions of others form a fundamental part of the self women construct, as women attempt to influence the opinions of other people. In aiming

to understand how women are able to impact upon the will of others through the material medium of clothing I applied Gell's theory of distributed personhood (Gell, 1998) to the wardrobe.

For Gell, selfhood is distributed through various objects, which are not passive but are fundamental to the mediation of agency. When applied to dressing, the assembled outfit is an external form through which women attempt to influence the will of others. Clothing is a medium through which women aim to convince others that they are, for example, fashionable and chic. However, when this notion of the co-agency of people and things is considered in context of the act of dressing, it becomes apparent that the transmission of intentionality is not as unidirectional as Gell's theory supposes. Clothing is a conduit for the wearer's intentions, yet this also makes women vulnerable to the opinions of others, as they penetrate deep within. Women's capacity to influence others through clothing is impeded even more when it is considered in light of the fact that clothing may carry the intentions of others, as seen in the cases of women wearing gifted or borrowed clothing. The will of the gifter or former wearer already inheres to the clothing. Therefore, in attempting to influence others through their clothing, women have to contend with the intentions of the gifter or former wearers that are already woven within the clothing.

The multiple agencies that may be externalized through clothing therefore challenge the idea that clothing is ever a straightforward expression of the self, and leads to a reconsideration of the central anthropological and sociological debate over the

relationship between the individual and the social. This interrelationship is pivotal to the act of getting dressed; the extent to which women are able to be 'themselves' yet still dress in a socially acceptable manner is an actual concern women are negotiating when dressing. Therefore this does not just involve the application of an abstract academic debate to an empirical practice, but rather is an interrelationship that women are grappling with whenever they dress. Through practice, women are engaging with the very terms of this debate. When seen through the practice of getting dressed, it becomes apparent that neither 'the social' nor 'the individual' precedes the other. One of the problems with research which takes a social identity as primary, and investigates clothing practices through it, is that by definition social categories are taken to precede acts of getting dressed. However, this research is not a signifier of the opposite tendency which is that clothing is seen as an expression of a unique psychological identity; drawing upon Goffman (1974), there is no pre-existing reality of self, but through cultural expectations the self is learned and performed. As such, dressing involves internalized social expectations, the imagined and actual opinions of others, yet is still a unique enactment. There is no prior self to be 'expressed' through clothing, as clothing is a particular medium through which the self is performed and created.

Through a focus upon this material process, self construction is seen as processual. For this, Miller's notion of objectification (1987), originally derived from Hegel, proved useful. For Hegel, self consciousness is understood as a process involving the self externalising itself in order to consider itself as an other. The resulting dissatisfaction with the self-as-other results in this externalisation being reintegrated through the creative

act of sublation, as the self is therein changed. The self is therefore not pre-existing, but is rather created through this act of objectification. In this thesis, I applied this theory to the act of dressing, as clothing may be an external form through which the self is considered, seen when women deliberate over whether an outfit is 'me'. In moments of success, there is an aesthetic fit as the outfit becomes 'me', and forms a successful externalisation of the self. Just as common are moments of aesthetic disjuncture, where the image in the mirror does not correspond to the wearer's anticipated self, as dressing becomes a failed attempt to find the self.

The incomplete process of self-development is particularly marked when considered through clothing. As the clothing is actually worn on the body, if it remains separate to the self, the wearer perceives the externality of the clothing all the more markedly. When clothing is seen phenomenologically, that is from the perspective of the wearer as an embodied experience (Entwistle, 2000), the importance of sensual experiences of bodily situatedness in the clothing becomes apparent. This perception is crucial in understanding clothing, and I have found it to be instrumental in understanding the particularity of clothing in externalizing memory, relationships and indeed the ways in which the self may be externalized through clothing. It is central to how the person is able to feel comfortable in their clothing. 'Comfort' is often seen as a self-evident, natural thing, linked to lack of physical constraint. However, what the material in this thesis points to is that 'comfort' corresponds to aesthetic fit, which is the conjunction of 'how I look' and 'how I feel'. Comfort is important in terms of how the wearer 'feels' in the item of clothing, as well as how the item looks.

When Miller's theory (1987) is seen through the act of dressing, it becomes apparent that it is not only important in terms of how women perceive themselves, but also that a crucial part of this perception and assessment incorporates the imagined opinions of others. As such, in this thesis, Mead's notion of the 'social individual' (1982: 102) was introduced, in order to extend an understanding of dressing as the self-conscious reflexive process of the construction of the self, yet through the eyes of others. This is discussed by Mead in terms of the relationship between the 'I' and the 'me'. The 'I' takes the position of how both specified and generic others will see the 'me'; as such, women are always relational in positioning themselves as viewers of them selves. When considering themselves in an external form, women do so through the gaze of specified others, an internalized generic gaze, which in some instances I discussed it even becomes autonomous.

This 'self' is always a social self, as it is constructed through the gaze of others and learnt, internalized social expectations. When clothing is considered phenomenologically, in terms of the experience of wearing clothing, it becomes evident that the way the wearer feels in clothing also has to be extended to include women's experience of the gaze of others. As such, issues of appearance are never just external, yet are also integral to the practice of wearing. Therefore 'social' and 'individual' aspects of dressing cannot be separated but rather are integrative; normative social expectations can never remain entirely social as clothing rests on the body, while women grapple with these internalized social expectations and the anticipated opinions of others.

Theory of the self through dressing:

This thesis has focused specifically upon the material practice of getting dressed from the array of clothing in the wardrobe; as I have outlined, this is also a process of self-construction. Therefore, I am not attempting to come up with a comprehensive theory of the self, but rather to understand how women create themselves through clothing, and the nature of the self they are able to construct. In this respect, the self that is created materially differs from, yet occurs in the context of, a wider discourse of the self. This discourse positions the self as immaterial and deep within the person and as a result it is assumed that this can be 'expressed' through clothing. However, it is one of the claims of this thesis that women are rarely able to simply express themselves through clothing. This assumes that women both have a self to express and indeed that this can straightforwardly be conveyed through clothing. The material in this thesis makes clear that clothing is not passive, as it may thwart the intentions of the wearer, and is also coagentic in constituting the person. Dressing is a creative act, as women are not just selecting a pre-existing externalised self from the wardrobe, but each outfit also incorporates occasions of wearing and the imagined opinions of others. Women never exist as isolated 'individuals' as they are situated in social networks, through both the wearing of gifted or borrowed clothing and as they have to construct themselves through the gaze and judgments of others. 'The self' does not stand in opposition to kinship and relationships, but in fact is created from within, and as part of, such social relations.

When the process of self-construction is considered through a particular material practice, the self is understood as processual. Whilst the assembling of outfits is creative, women do not create novel selves each time they dress, but rather draw from the diverse resources of their wardrobe. Writing on the wearing of Hindu masks on ritual occasions in Bali, Napier (1985) points to the ways in which masks draw out of the wearer diverse psychological states and personality traits. The traits which are mobilised are particular to the mask and so, on different occasions, entirely contradictory characteristics may be drawn out of the person. This allows for an internal ambivalence. This sense of drawing out traits from 'within' through material means is also apparent in Strathern's research into body decorations in Mount Hagen (1979). Such decorations are not an act of disguise, as the decorations bring to the skin and the appearance what is ordinarily 'inside' (1979: 249). Whilst both examples are from extremely different contexts, they both point to the material means through which aspects of the self which are not ordinarily visible may be activated.

This is particularly pertinent when considered in light of the findings of this research; in assembling outfits from their wardrobes, women are draping aspects of themselves around their bodies, such as personality traits, capacities and their ethnicity. Through the materiality of clothing, I have argued that dressing is an act of 'surfacing' aspects of the self. This can also be extended to include temporal aspects of the self, as various pasts are brought together in one outfit, as a former aspect of the self is reactivated and made 'present' in the transient act of wearing. Dressing is, therefore, an act both of 'surfacing' and also of 'presenting' disparate aspects of the self. This can be further extended to

consider how when women wear gifted or borrowed items, they are similarly able to activate aspects of a relationally constituted self.

My theory that dressing is an act of 'surfacing' reinforces aspects of Goffman's understanding of the relationship between self-identity and the social roles. For Goffman, personal identity persists over time, consisting of multiple capacities (1974). These capacities are activated and cohere dependent upon particular social situations in the form of social roles, which involves the bringing together of particular specialized capabilities (1971a, 1974). The selection of a particular outfit can be seen to draw together certain traits from the multiple attributes and capabilities that women have. What my research makes apparent is that clothing not only brings out personality traits, but also is temporally dynamic in reawakening former aspects of the self, and indeed aspects of the relational self. Therefore in creating an outfit, women are able to draw not only on aspects 'within' but by wearing the items of others, are able to extend themselves through their relationships, and in turn integrate aspects of others within them 'selves'. The self is therefore temporally and spatially disparate.

For Goffman, these roles tend to be occupational, or related to status, yet what I have shown in this thesis is that 'being normal' is in fact a role in Goffman's sense. This is seen in the presence of 'habitual' wear in every single wardrobe I looked at, which despite the fact that clothing worn at home will not be seen by others is in fact extremely conformist in its style. By the same token, I have also argued that 'being individual' is also a role, just as the normative is an aspect of the self, rather than the self in its totality

as the dominant discourse would suppose. What emerges from my research is that the self is extremely contradictory: as conformist and individual, un-thought out and simultaneously reflexive. This is seen in the fundamental division of all wardrobes: habitual and non-habitual clothing. The interplay between the two is the underlying logic to the act of getting dressed, as women strive to both be themselves and to make choices they 'know' are them, yet to still be creative. This interplay between the need for security, yet still to be changing and dynamic, recapitulates the dynamic between individuality and conformity that Simmel identified as the core dynamic of fashion. What I have demonstrated is that this is also fundamental relationship to clothing and is a key tension within the self. Simmel argued that it is the co-existent tension between the two that leads to the changes that inhere to fashion.

When fashion is seen from the perspective of the wardrobe it is apparent that these shifts are gradual, as they emerge from pre-existing personal aesthetics and clothing rules. Unlike the radical shifts in styles as presented in retail outlets or fashion magazines, the fashion shifts I have observed are more gradual. The gradual process of innovation is made possible through the dynamism of the wardrobe. Similarly, the creativity that is definitive of the self as constructed through dressing, arises not out of radical changes in styles, but from the dialectic between habitual and non-habitual clothing. Habitual and non-habitual clothing are not separate sections of the wardrobe, but are mutually dependent and it is the interplay between the two which is the crucial factor in understanding the logic of dressing and women's relationship to clothing. The actual selection of an outfit involves women making an aesthetic commitment to one look, even

if when a degree of contradiction can be incorporated, women cannot be all of the possibilities of their wardrobes. As such, the dialogue between habitual and non habitual clothing is not always apparent from the public self that is presented. This foundational dynamic is only therefore fully understood through looking at getting dressed from an ethnography of the whole wardrobe.

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Appendix 1: Bio-pics

London:

Non-network women:

1. Sonya:

She lives with her partner of 10 years, who she met at university. He has a well-paid job and they own their flat. They have no children. She is a full-time research student and is in her early 30s. Her parents live in London too, as does her sister and her two children. None of her family lives very close within the city. She is from London, yet lived in India for a few years when she was schooled. Her parents are Kenyan Asian.

2. Sadie:

She lives with 2 friends, and is 19. She is from Manchester originally, where her parents and brother live together. Her sister, brother in law and 3 nephews also live in Manchester, which is where they are all from. She is single. Many of her friends still live in Manchester, the rest live all over London. She works full-time in a high street shop.

3. Margaret:

She lives with her husband, and works as a primary school teacher; they have bought their house. They have no children and she's now in her early 30s. Her sister and husband also live in London. She is originally Irish where her parents live.

4. Marie:

She lives with a friend in east London, and is a librarian. She is in her late 20s and is from the suburbs of London, where her parents still live. She has 1 sister who also lives in London.

5. Sarah:

She lives with 2 friends in north London and is in her late 20s. She's originally from Yorkshire, where her parents live; she works in a high-end high street shop as a buyer. Her boyfriend lives in Oxford.

6. Joanna:

She lives in north London in a former council flat with her husband, and two other lodgers from her church and is in her late 20s. She is Christian, and is a missionary, originally from Korea. Her husband is English. Her family (parents, brother and sister) all live in Korea. Her father and sister-in law live in London. Her church and friends are also in London.

Network 1:

All 3 women are extremely well off, and have been brought up in relatively privileged backgrounds.

1. Mumtaz

She's a Ugandan Asian, and has lived in Uganda, Kenya, India (with her first husband), Paris and London. She lived in the latter 2 locations with her current husband. She currently lives with her husband, 2 children (11 and 13) in her parents' house, although

they are about to buy their own home in the same area. Her husband is in a very highly paid job. She's in her late 40s. Her sister-in-law is Theresa.

2. Patsy

She's in her early 30s, single, and lives in her mother's town house in Chelsea. She works in PR and is reasonably well off. She is considering buying her own home soon. She has lots of female friends whom live in the area. Theresa is her sister, they are very close. They grew up in Surrey, where their mother still lives.

3. Theresa

She is in her mid 30s, and lives with her husband and their two children (4 and 5); they have just moved to their own home in the suburbs. Her husband works in central London, and owns his business. Her mother-in-law lives near Oxford and regularly goes on holiday with Theresa and her family.

Network 2:

1. Vivienne

She's in her late 50s, was born in London and has always lived there. Her mother was Russian, and her father a Polish Jew – they were first generation immigrants. She has been married and divorced twice (to an Iranian, and then a Czech man). She has 1 son, and 2 daughters all of whom have moved out yet live in London, whom she sees often, as does her niece. She owns a home in north London, and often has people coming to stay

with her. She is now retired, formerly being a political researcher. Her best friend from school is Pat, whom she sees often.

2. Pat

She lives in North London with her husband and is in her late 50s. She has always lived in that part of London, and in the same house which they own for the last 35 years. She is Jewish, but does not practice. Her son lives in Yorkshire, and her daughter Rosie (below) whom she sees often, also lives in London. Many of her friends and work colleagues live near by. She still works in education.

3. Rosie

She is Pat's daughter, and lives with her husband. She's in her mid 30s, and she has a highly paid job, as does her husband. They own their own home, which is large by London standards. Her job leads to a great deal of traveling, and she makes an immense investment in clothing. She has lots of friends living all over London, dating back to her school days.

4. Sandra

She is Vivienne's youngest daughter, is 20, and lives with 3 friends from university (including Jane and Lisa below). She is single.

5. Jane

She is 20, from the suburbs of London, where her family still live. She is single.

6. Lisa

She is 20, originally from Cambridge, where many of her friends still live – as do her parents and sister.

Nottingham:

Non-network women:

1. Faye:

She is single and in her mid-30s and lives with 11 year old son in a council house in Nottingham. Her mother and father live within the same city, as does her 'gang' of friends. She is unemployed, and is from Nottingham. Her parents help financially when she struggles.

Network 1:

All these women are doing the same MA in fashion (design and marketing), as such are mostly in poor financial positions (with the exception of Emanuela who is older, and has a husband who earns reasonably well).

1. Alice

She lives in Nottingham with a group of friends, having been to university there. She is in her early 20s. Her parents and 2 sisters live in London, where she is from. Her boyfriend lives in London too.

2. Gemma

She lives in Nottingham with her friend Anna (below). She's from Nottingham and in her early 20s, her parents live close by (she lived at home during her fashion degree), as does her boyfriend.

3. Helen

She is from Northern Ireland originally, where her parents and family live, and moved to Nottingham for her degree. She is in her early 20s, and lives with her husband (who is employed), who's also Irish. She is an active Christian.

4. Emanuela

She is from Manchester, her parents are Italian and still live in Manchester, and has just turned 40. She lives with her husband, who is in full-time employment, and her 11 year old daughter in their own home; she used to teach, is a Buddhist, and now wants to be a textile designer.

5. Anna

She lives with her friend Gemma, and is from Nottingham, having lived with her parents during her degree. She is in her early 20s. All of her friends live in Nottingham.

6. Louise

She is in her early 20s and is from the south of England originally where her family (she has a sister too) live; she lives with her boyfriend now. She did her degree in Nottingham,

many of her friends still live in Nottingham. She struggles the most financially of this group of women.

Network 2:

All these women are doing a creative MA in Nottingham.

1. Rosanna

She is from the another town in the Midlands, where her mother, father in law and little sister live. She works part time in a bar and club, and lives in a council flat in Nottingham; formerly with her boyfriend, who has now moved out. Many of her friends live in Nottingham. She is in her mid-20s.

2. Clare

She is from the south of England originally; where her mother still lives, as do her father, and his new family. Her sister also lives there, with her husband and daughter. She is in her mid-20s and lives with her boyfriend (from her home town).

3. Akane

She is Japanese, and is only spending the year in Nottingham. She lives with another Japanese girl; almost all of her friends, her boyfriend and family live in Japan. She is in her late 20s. She has a passion for high-fashion.

4. Nom

She is from Thailand, and is spending the year in Nottingham. Her family and boyfriend still live in Thailand. She lives with 2 friends, and is in her late 20s.

5. Lydia

She is in her mid 30s and lives with her husband who has a highly paid job. They own their house, and do a lot of DIY. She used to work in product designer for a major high street retailer. She is from the Midlands originally.

Appendix 2: breakdown of active/inactive clothing.

	items (no.)	unworn	rarely	sometimes	often	habitual	work	former often	former work
Rosanna	135	27	36	14	6	23	0	29	0
Clare	64	1	26	0	17	11	9	0	0
Alice	67	0	5	33	25	4	0	0	0
Gemma	86	2	24	21	3	15	0	21	0
Akane	39	0	3	20	12	4	0	0	0
Helen	104	2	28	30	13	5	6	20	0
Emanuela	110	0	30	46	10	19	0	5	0
Nom	35	1	5	13	10	6	0	0	0
Anna	47	1	7	15	6	16	0	2	0
Louise	97	1	15	11	31	6	1	32	0
Lydia	155	6	62	52	15	9	0	4	7
Faye	73	0	20	22	15	14	0	2	0
Mumtaz	182	19	21	73	39	10	0	20	0
Patsy	176	7	32	60	27	23	0	27	0
Theresa	154	0	28	43	35	11	0	17	20
Sonya	109	1	33	38	15	21	0	1	0
Margaret	87	0	21	23	18	11	12	2	0
Joanna	83	4	15	27	15	15	7	0	0
Sarah	54	1	5	24	8	8	3	5	0
Marie	72	0	9	13	10	7	30	3	0
Sadie	81	8	12	17	15	16	0	13	0
Lisa	76	0	10	17	23	13	11	2	0
Sandra	110	9	19	36	27	5	0	14	0
Rosie	151	3	41	31	17	8	38	13	0
Jane	58	2	12	21	11	10	0	2	0
Pat	108	0	25	33	32	18	0	0	0
Vivienne	129	9	27	48	21	6	0	18	0
averages:	98.5	3.85	21.1	28.93	17.6	11.63	4.33	9.33	1